

# **Christian Theology as Comparative Theology:**

**Case Studies in Abrahamic Faiths**

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## DESCRIPTION

This course discusses some key Christian dogmatic themes such as Scripture/Revelation, Doctrine of Trinity, and Christology in comparative dialogue with other Abrahamic faiths (Islam and Judaism). A move from confrontation to an authentic dialogue is badly needed in our multireligious world in order to avoid conflict and seek for a peaceful co-existence among religions. Although conflicts arise for many reasons, deeply held theological and religious doctrines certainly play a significant role.

The course introduces first the nature and task of comparative theology and its place in theological curriculum, including its relationship to the theology of religions. Thereafter, the above-mentioned dogmatic themes as understood in mainline Christian tradition (and ecumenical confessions) will be put in dialogue with standard Islamic and Jewish doctrinal understanding as defined in their scriptures and authoritative tradition.

The attached reading materials will be utilized in some class sessions. They would also make good preparatory reading materials. Power Point presentations used in some sessions will be made available to students during the week of instruction.

There are two ways of completing the course:

1) Lectures (20 h) + critical reflection or lecture diary = 2 ECTS (2 op), or

2) Lectures (20 h) + critical reflection or lecture diary + to read a relevant text on a comparative theological theme (150-180 pages to be agreed with the instructor) and integrate those materials in either critical reflections or lecture diary = 5 ECTS (5 op)

## OUTLINE

**Religious Diversity as a Theological Challenge**  
**Introduction to Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology**  
**Religious Studies, Religion(s), and Theology**  
**Inclusivism and Religious Pluralism(s) in a Theological Assessment**  
**Revelation, Scripture, and Authority among Abrahamic Faiths**  
**Jewish and Christian theologies of revelation**  
**Islamic and Christian theologies of revelation**  
**Jesus Christ and Salvation among Abrahamic Traditions**  
**Jewish Interpretations of Jesus and Salvation**  
**Islamic Interpretations of Jesus and Salvation**  
**Yahweh, Allah, and Triune God: Common Affirmation and Dividing Issues**  
**Concluding Reflections and Tasks for the Future**

**READINGS FOR COMMPARATIVE THEOLOGY IN ABRAHAMIC  
FAITHS**

Excerpts from:

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation. A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, vol. 1 (Eerdmans, 2013), chs. 10 and 15.

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## **CHAPTER 1: Revelation, Scripture, and Authority among Abrahamic Faiths**

### **The Widening Horizon of the Discourse on Revelation and Scripture in a Pluralistic World**

The problem with pre-critical Christian tradition is not the confidence it had about the truthfulness of the biblical revelation but the fact that it offered no resources in negotiating with other religious traditions that, each in their own ways, made similar claims to ultimate truth. Common sense tells that it is not possible to assume that numerous such claims are equally correct - or incorrect! Hence, comparative theology is not saying that because there is a number of competing truth claims, none can be true. It rather looks for ways for a peaceful interaction of competing traditions, comparing notes, and giving distinctive testimony to what each tradition honestly believes. Consequently, in light of the religious and philosophical plurality of our times, “[i]t is useless to say that God makes his revelation self-authenticating.”<sup>1</sup> Hence, such certainty cannot be a matter of simple self-evidence,<sup>2</sup> be it based on the notion of a “Christian” state - or Islamic or Buddhist or Hindu state - or consensus, or territorial occupancy, or something similar that is external in nature.<sup>3</sup>

It is now obvious to us even in the American context - and the situation is even more urgent in most European settings - that Christian faith can no longer be taken as the religion of the land.<sup>4</sup> True, most Americans still identify themselves with Christian tradition. However, as the polling by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008) reports, “the United States is on the verge of becoming a minority Protestant country.” The Roman Catholic Church has suffered even more dramatic losses. More than one-quarter of Americans have changed their faith allegiance or ended up as confessing no faith.<sup>5</sup> Both religious diversity and pervasive secularism have transformed the American and European cultures in dramatic ways. In the Global South religious diversity is taken for granted and is a matter of fact in many areas; secularism is doing much more poorly therein. Consequently, “We do our theology from now on in the midst of many others ‘who are not . . . of this fold.’ Our own faith, if only we are aware of it, is a constantly renewed decision, taken in the knowledge that other faiths are readily available to us.”<sup>6</sup>

While a rigid, fundamentalistic sticking with one’s own Scripture and its authority may lead to disastrous and violent consequences, what Martin E. Marty calls “lethal theology,”<sup>7</sup> one has to be mindful of the identity-forming agency of “canonical” Scriptures in any religious tradition. So, how to negotiate the need to avoid religious conflicts and violence, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, continue faithfully building on the received scriptural tradition?

Unfortunately, that question has not occupied the minds of most theologians so far. Sheer lack of knowledge of religions usually nurtures not only misguided remarks on them but also negative attitudes. Even such a careful theologian as Emil Brunner could say of other living faiths that they are “essentially eudaemonistic and anthropocentric”<sup>8</sup> and, even worse,

“religions of self-redemption.”<sup>9</sup> Rightly Timothy Tennett notes: “In the West, it is rare to find someone who has more than a cursory knowledge of the sacred texts of other religions. In contrast, because Christians in the Majority World are often in settings dominated by other religions, it is not uncommon to meet a Christian with a Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist background who has an intimate knowledge of another sacred text.”<sup>10</sup> Hence, a careful and well-informed tackling of religious diversity “here at home” and “out there” is an urgent task for any theology for the third millennium worth its salt.

These many objections and rebuttals to the whole notion of the *doctrine* of revelation should be acknowledged and carefully reflected upon if one is going to make a serious attempt to construct a more satisfactory and adequate doctrinal account of the Christian theology of revelation. The Jesuit Avery Dulles makes the important, but often neglected observation that the “theology of revelation offers peculiar methodological problems” in that it “is not a part of doctrinal theology (or dogmatics) as ordinarily understood, for doctrinal theology . . . customarily tests its assertions by their conformity with what is already recognized as revelation.”<sup>11</sup> The current project seeks to develop a contemporary theology of revelation in the matrix of both contextual-global-intercultural diversity, including questions of inclusivity and power, and the diversity of living faiths and their claims to revelation and authority. Such an attempt will be best described as “the polymorphous character of revelation.”<sup>12</sup> Such a multifaceted and dynamic vision of revelation may offer resources for a new way of thinking of revelation in a diverse and pluralistic world. The ultimate goal is “to articulate a concept of revelation which will be true to the main orthodox Christian tradition, yet which will be open to a fruitful interaction with other traditions, and with the developing corpus of scientific knowledge.”<sup>13</sup>

### **The Challenge and Complexity of Interfaith Engagement of Scriptures**

Putting Christian Scripture and doctrine of revelation in a mutual dialogue with some other living faiths is an enormous challenge. To begin with, the reservoir of sacred Scriptures is amazingly huge among religions - illustrated by the classic work of Max Müller’s *Sacred Books of the East* in fifty hefty volumes; yet even that “library” misses noteworthy portions of Scriptures from various parts of Asia!

Whereas until recent decades religious studies as an academic discipline used to undermine the importance of *written* Scriptures for the study of religions, giving preference to nontextual elements such as ritual, myth, and symbols,<sup>14</sup> more recently a new appreciation of the importance of written Scriptures to the study and knowledge of religions has emerged. That is not to undermine the importance of other elements such as folk religiosity, arts, and ritual, but rather to acknowledge that basically all living faiths are either based on or have been shaped in the presence of authoritative Scriptures.<sup>15</sup> “In all religions the scriptural word is seen as a means of revealing or realizing the Divine.”<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting and theologically important to note that while most religions have either the canonical or otherwise determined “primary” Scripture (Torah, Qur’an, Bible, Vedas, Tipitaka), they also have a huge secondary literature that typically is believed to be based on and derive its (relative) authority from the primary revelation. Hence the Jews have the extensive Talmud, the “Oral Torah”; the Muslims have the huge collection of *Hadith*; the main way to study the Vedas is the growing commentary literature in Vedic Hinduism and the whole *smṛti* tradition for the rest of the Hindus. The Christian church has accumulated a massive secondary literature of creedal and other definitive traditions. An important theological task not only for Christians but also for Jews, Hindus, and Muslims is to discern the relationship between the “canonical” and “extra-canonical” texts, to use the Christian parlance.

So far we have spoken of “Scriptures” as if the term were self-evident. It is not. A number of aspects vary among religions regarding what is called Scripture. First of all, religions such as Judaism, Islam, and Christianity have a clearly defined and closed canon. In many others, most profoundly in Buddhism, especially in Mahayana traditions, there is hardly any notion of a “closed canon.” Hinduism lies somewhere in between, as it has the twofold structure of primary, most authoritative Scriptures, the Vedas (*śruti*), and the secondary *smṛti* collections of various types of materials, from epics to songs to folklore and so forth. Even the collection of Vedas, let alone the rest of the Hindu Scriptures, is immense. Hence, in a typical household in India, a small part of an important epic in the *smṛti* collection, the Bhagavad-Gita, may be the only Scripture available. Or consider Taoism, which embraces more than 1,000 scriptural texts!

Scriptures also play different roles in various religions. Whereas Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - as well as most profoundly Zoroastrianism - can be rightly called “religions of the book” because of the necessary and authoritative role played by the written canonical Scripture, in Hinduism, the spoken word is primary. The Vedas, even though found in written form in Sanskrit, are considered to be divine speech, and hence the written form is inferior to the “oral text.”<sup>17</sup> Hence, Julius Lipner rightly and importantly speaks of “[t]he voice of scripture as Veda” when speaking of “scripture” in Hinduism. He also remind us that the term “scripture” from Latin “to write” poorly describes Hindu intuition; hence, the Sanskrit term *śabda*, from “to make a sound” and “to call” is more appropriate.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, whereas almost all religions of the world regard their Scriptures as inspired and divinely originated, that is not the case with all traditions. Buddhism has no concept of divine inspiration. Even more profoundly, Confucianism regards its Scripture as a human product, although hugely important for religion. One could also, perhaps somewhat ironically, point to Liberal Protestantism in Christianity, according to which the Bible is merely an invaluable human sharing of responses to religious experiences.

Finally, the nature and function of Scripture among various traditions vary greatly. For the typical Muslim the Qur’anic revelation is true verbatim and relates to all aspects of life. Typical contemporary Jews and Christians

consider Scripture as the ultimate authority, even though, apart from fundamentalists, they consider its principles and thoughts to be the inspired guide to faith and practice. For most Buddhists, Scripture's main role and authority lies in their capacity to convey Buddha's enlightenment and precepts. It is the Scripture's "object" rather than the Scripture as such that is highly venerated and authoritative. In Hinduism, Brahmins study Vedas as the divinely originated religious (and in many traditions, philosophical) authority, whereas for most Hindus, scriptural content comes in the form of folklore, rituals, artistic forms, and the general cultural environment in India.

These diversities in mind, it is important to be mindful of the danger of generalizations and assumptions. The Christian theologian approaches the interfaith exchange between Scriptures and notions of revelation among other living faiths through the lens of his or her own tradition. The Muslim scholar would do the same, and so forth. The Christian student does well to remember what has been called the "Protestant bias" in the study of religions' Scriptures.<sup>19</sup> This simply means that

Certain mainstream Protestant ideas about the nature of scripture colored the study of the scriptures of other religions and only today are being identified and corrected. They can be listed serially: a preoccupation with textuality to the exclusion of orality, from the Protestant emphasis on the scripture as *written*; an individualistic orientation that assumes that scriptures are to be read mainly by the individual, from Protestant ideas of the "priesthood of all believers" and universal literacy; the notion that scriptures are widely authoritative over every aspect of religious life, from the Protestant assertion that the scriptures are the sole authority in the Christian faith; and the assumption that scriptures are best understood by academically recognized methods of study, from mainstream Protestant attachment to sound academic procedures.<sup>20</sup>

One of the biases mentioned in this list calls for more comment. It has to do with the preference, at times almost exclusive, for written rather than oral Scriptures, which is the hallmark of not only the current Protestant world but also the whole of Christian tradition. Indeed, the prioritization of the written over the oral is a larger cultural development going back to the invention of printing on the eve of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>21</sup> The Protestant Reformation took full advantage of the new printing capacities in its desire to put the Bible in the hand of every Christian. Industrialization and more recently globalization with the expansion of information production have all contributed to the hegemony of the written over the spoken. Even the current virtual world relies on written texts as much as it includes other forms of communication. The French philosopher Jacques Ellul rightly saw *The Humiliation of the Word*, particularly the spoken word, in our current culture, no longer limited to the Global North but also, with the rise of Western-type of schooling, taking place in the Global South.

For Ellul, the printed and spoken word are not merely two complementary and convenient ways of communication; they differ in nature from each other. Since spoken words function as symbols and evoke emotions, they cannot be reduced to mere facts (even though they also

contain cognitive content). The modern and contemporary fixation with the printed text treats printed words as signs that have a fixed reference and by and large convey information.<sup>22</sup> Ellul is of course too smart to naively dismiss the importance of printed text - as prolific a writer as he is; his point is that we should work hard in holding on to the complementary and necessarily mutually dependent role of writing and speaking, seeing and hearing, symbolic and informative. For the purposes of this discussion, that is an essential observation. The pluriform nature of Christian revelation calls for an inclusive, multifaceted, and multilayered concept of communication, including the oral.

The eclipse of the oral Scripture in Christian tradition is an odd development when looked at historically. The First Testament of the Bible, shared by the Jewish tradition, builds essentially on the role of oral transmission of scriptural content and emphasizes the importance of remembering and reciting the Lord's commands and blessings. Consider only Deuteronomy chapter 6, the great pedagogical mandate for all Israelite parents to instill in their children's minds the precepts of the Lord. Much better than Christianity, Judaism has maintained the habit of learning and reciting scriptural words even after biblical times. Jesus and the apostles, as Jews, memorized and recited Scriptures daily. The early church also did that as the Gospels were not yet written and were circulating in the oral form. In the Islamic tradition, oral memorization and recital of Scripture took even higher importance. "Indeed, spiritual merit in Islam is said to be measured by the thoroughness of one's oral knowledge of the scripture. According to the tradition, on the day of resurrection everyone will be called upon to rise up and recite the Qur'an."<sup>23</sup> Examples from other living faith traditions could be easily accumulated to make the case for the significance of the oral form of Scripture, an intuition basically lost in contemporary Christian faith and theology.<sup>24</sup>

Coupled with the eclipse of the oral "Scriptures," Western religious studies and theological studies have also bracketed out the importance of noncognitive, "spiritual" forms of appreciating, appropriating, and living out Scriptures. The post-Enlightenment academic paradigm has one-sidedly sought to merely analyze, using the best critical tools, religious texts with little consideration of their pluriform meaning and use in all living traditions. This is, of course, related to the Enlightenment-based replacement of the concept of God with religion.<sup>25</sup> The theologian Keith Ward's observation is right on target: "The language of religion is like the language of poetry; and it is a major heresy of post-Enlightenment rationalism to try to turn poetry into pseudo-science, to turn the images of religion, whose function is to evoke eternity, into mundane descriptions of improbable facts."<sup>26</sup> In the same spirit, Howard Coward, himself a leading scholar of world religions, gives this correction:

But discursive academic study is always of secondary importance, since knowledge of the Transcendent can never be fully captured and communicated in words. Spiritual transformation takes place more through the continuous action of the memorized words, which have become a part of the very structure of consciousness, than through intellectual study. The

poetic power of the words to point beyond themselves and resonate strongly with the Transcendent is a major force in the religious transformation of consciousness.<sup>27</sup>

In religions, Scriptures - at least the “canonical ones” - play a “foundational” role, not only in guiding belief and practice but also in the forming of the way the world is viewed. In his investigation into five religious traditions, Ward seeks to discern what he calls “a revelatory matrix.” “A revelatory matrix is a paradigm metaphor which encapsulates a particular vision of the world.” An example of this is the famous idea mentioned in the *Isa Upanishad*: “Those who see all beings in the Self and the Self in all things, will never doubt It.”<sup>28</sup> A matrix is not there only for explanation. “It seeks to evoke a way of life which is regulated, in its most general forms of apprehension and action, by a controlling metaphor. . . . The term ‘matrix’ seems appropriate for it, because it is a basic mould or pattern which forms our most general perception of things and our reactions to them.”<sup>29</sup>

A revelatory matrix at work in major living faiths has three interrelated functions: “It is regulative for human understanding, providing a paradigm by which an explanation can be given of how things are and of how they came to be as they are.”<sup>30</sup> Just think of how well this definition applies to Christian theology of revelation, particularly as it is built on the self-revelation of the Triune God in the embodiment of the eternal Logos in one historical person. “The source of the matrix is revelation; either the claim to omniscience, as traditionally with Sakyamuni [Gautama Buddha] and Jesus, or a claim to inspired knowledge given by a suprahuman source to a chosen person, as with the authors of the Veda, Torah, and Koran.” Rather than merely seeking to describe the Divine, revelation proposes a way of liberation from sin as in Christianity or *dukkha* as in Buddhism or “ignorance” as in Hinduism.<sup>31</sup>

Some recent approaches in systematic and constructive theology may turn out to be helpful in capturing a more holistic view of Scriptures not only in Christian but also other faith traditions. These include approaches such as Vanhoozer’s *The Drama of Doctrine*, engaged widely in the discussion above, and William A. Dyrness’s *Poetic Theology*, which builds on the intuition that since religion - and knowledge of God - comes to us in so many forms, the category of the “poetic” in the most inclusive sense, going back to the Aristotelian notion of “making,” is needed along with the more traditional discursive approach.

In a systematic/constructive theology project such as the current one in which the category of revelation and the notions of Scripture are approached mainly from the perspective of textual analysis and with a focus on “official” authoritative texts such as Vedas or Torah or Qur’an, we need the constant reminder of the primacy in many religions of the oral rather than written, poetic rather than discursive,<sup>32</sup> communal rather than individual orientations. In addition to its help in academic constructive work, mindfulness of this wider framework may help the Christian church and theologians be more inclusive and “relevant.”

## The First and the Second Testaments

### **Salient Features of Torah as Revelation**

Christian and Jewish traditions of course hold much in common when it comes to Scripture. Simply put: a greater part of the Christian Bible is Jewish..

The origins and reception of both Hindu and Islamic<sup>33</sup> religions are nonhistorical. Whereas the origin of the Vedas is the eternal divine speech and that of Qur'an the divine dictation via the angel to the Prophet, according to "the first book of the Hebrew Bible, Judaism has its historical origins in the act of obedience."<sup>34</sup> The origins of the Hebrew people lie in the response of faith of the forefather Abram (later named Abraham) who obediently set out on a journey to the Promised Land (Gen. 12:1-3). As the later history of the First Testament narrates it, this "missionary call" was meant to bring blessing not only to the family of Israel but also to the whole world. Hence, the universal scope of this particular and local revelation.

As a result, several interrelated aspects shape and make distinctive the Jewish revelation and its Scriptures. First, it is deeply embedded in the historical process. While divine in its origin, the revelation is given and received in the matrix of human life at personal, tribal, national, and international levels. Second, its focus is on ethical and moral obedience. This is not to deny the importance of moral precepts in other living faiths - only consider Buddhism. It is to say that in other living faiths, the connection between moral conduct and religious practice, belief in God and righteous walks of life as expression thereof, is not established in the integral way it is in Judaism<sup>35</sup> - and of course, by implication, in Christianity. Third, because revelation comes in the unfolding of history, it looks into history, to the future, for future fulfillment. But being oriented to Yahweh's final intervention, the most significant sign and manifestation of which is the arrival of the Messiah, does not mean that therefore Jewish faith is otherworldly. It is not. Indeed, one of the most significant differences between the Jewish and Christian views of revelation is that the latter is deeply eschatologically oriented and hence its revelational category of promise is also eschatological, as discussed above. Judaism focuses on the implications of revelation for this world. Ward succinctly notes: "For Judaism, revelation comes in the form of Teaching; not a teaching about the nature of the universe, but a set of practical principles for communal life, enjoining wholeness, a loving and obedient relationship to God, and social justice."<sup>36</sup>

The focus on this-worldly needs and concerns, however, has nothing to do with the ethos of Christian Classical Liberalism, which made Jesus merely a convenient ethical teacher. Judaism's this-worldly orientation is fully and absolutely based in Yahweh, the creator, almighty ruler, and personal Father of all. Israel is to submit in love and covenant faithfulness to the One who loves and is faithful. Part of the revelation is also the readiness - albeit at times, quite reluctantly - to become the object of Yahweh's fatherly rebuke when ethical standards and covenant faithfulness is lacking. Rightly it can be noted that the First Testament is "surely the most self-critical body of literature any people has ever produced . . . [and] has ultimately only one hero: God."<sup>37</sup>

For the Jewish faith, revelation is propositional in nature. Two important considerations help highlight the importance of the propositional nature of revelation. On the one hand, according to ancient tradition - although not supported by recent Jewish historical academic study - Moses basically received the Law by way of divine “dictation.” On the other hand, what he received - whether, in light of contemporary understanding of the formation of canon, it happened as “dictation” or not - the detailed lists of commands, exhortations, laws, and practices conveyed by Yahweh can only be appreciated as cognitive, propositional statements. How different is the content of the Hebrew Bible’s law code from the style and content of, say, the Rig Vedas of Hinduism? And yet, Vedanta and other Hindu theologians take Vedas as propositional statements as well, whatever else they are.

The center and most sacred part of the Jewish canon, *Tanakh*,<sup>38</sup> is *Torah* (“teaching,” “instruction”). In written form it is the “Five Books of Moses.” An important counterpart is the Oral Torah, which came to full flourishing with the emergence of rabbinic Judaism beginning from around the Common Era, but which was believed to have been revealed to Moses along with the written Torah as well. The two other parts of the canon, albeit not as sacred, are *Nevi'im* (Prophetic books) and *Ketuvim* (“Writings”).<sup>39</sup> A noteworthy observation about the second part, the prophetic books, is that a significant portion of that collection are writings that could be better labeled as “historical books” (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings). In the Jewish theological outlook, however, they are rightly located since Yahweh is the Lord of history and hence, the post-Enlightenment separation of “secular” and “sacred” history is a foreign idea. Similarly, the last book of the Hebrew Bible (which, incidentally in the Christian OT is placed after 1-2 Kings), the two-volume Chronicles is placed at the end of the canon because it ends in a hopeful note of the release from the exodus. It is a book of promise, pointing toward future fulfillment. It is fittingly placed in the collection that is mainly about wisdom and religious poetry and parable.

If “prophetic Judaism” (the Judaism until the beginning of c.e.) brought about the Hebrew Bible as we have it now, it is rabbinic Judaism that produced the huge and varied collections of the so-called Oral Torah; the nomenclature “oral,” of course, has to be taken in a qualified sense here: while put into written form in Mishnahs (and commented on in Talmuds), it is believed to be oral in its first transmission from Yahweh to Moses. While not canonical in the sense of Torah (and the rest of the Hebrew Bible), its importance is irreplaceable as it helps make the written Torah living and applicable to ever-new situations. Hence the importance of *midrash*, the meticulous examination of the written text to find its right and true meaning.

Rabbinic Judaism became the dominant form of the religion following the devastation caused by the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 c.e., which of course meant yet another loss of the land and more importantly the temple, the earthly locus and guarantee of God’s presence. Not surprisingly, rabbinic Judaism was not a uniform movement; it consisted of several fractions, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees, both of which held Torah as the canonical Scripture but had opposite views concerning the value of extra-scriptural tradition. The Sadducees took only the received text of the

written Scripture as authoritative, as it has been entrusted to the priesthood, and consequently they regarded any tradition whose sources was not in the written Scripture as human invention.

The Pharisees, who became the mainstream of rabbinic Judaism after 70 c.e., did not think the canonical status of the written Scripture excluded the importance of later developing tradition. Through painstaking study of the Law (Torah) and the rest of the canon, they uncovered meanings not apparent at a cursory reading. For the Pharisees - and indeed, for rabbinic Judaism at large - revelation is thus “progressive,” unlike traditional prophetic Judaism, which believes in the reception by Moses of Yahweh’s revelation; if the term “progressive revelation” is too much, then we should speak at least of “progressive interpretation of revelation” in Rabbinicism.<sup>40</sup> This huge Oral Torah is classified under the general categories of *halakah*, ritual and legal practices and traditions, and *haggadah*, with its focus on homiletics, ethics, exegesis, and theology. The first major such work that also became foundational to the Oral Torah is the Mishnah, compiled in the second century c.e. Huge collections of Talmudic tractates - the most important of which are the Babylonian and Palestinian - emerged as commentaries on the Mishnah over several centuries. The Babylonian Talmud, completed in the sixth century c.e., is the most important of these works and an indispensable resource for everything Jewish.<sup>41</sup>

In medieval times when revisionist movements arose, such as Karaism, which questioned and basically rejected the rabbinic notion of Jewish tradition, and Kabbalism, which, unlike Karaism, did not reject either rabbinic tradition or the Oral Torah, but rather filled it with new meanings, often highly speculative and imaginative.

As important as prophetic and rabbinic Judaism is to that religion, in the contemporary world there are a number of nonorthodox movements, beginning from the Reform movements of the mid-nineteenth century to various Liberal schools of our era. While all these movements, in some sense or another, consider Torah the canonical Scripture, wide disagreements have to do with how to deal with the rules (*mitzvot*) of Torah in the contemporary world. Should they be taken “literally,” as the unchanging will of God for all ages? Are they supposed to be considered principles with different applications? Or are they such that many of them cannot be taken as an expression of the will of God at all? Consider just the many dietary and other rules of Leviticus or the passages in Psalms and elsewhere that seem to ordain violence.

### Scripture and the Covenants

In order to locate the Jewish tradition in the multifaith matrix, it is helpful to follow Ward’s characterization. He identifies Judaism as seminal and intermediate. It is seminal in its functioning as the basis for two other faiths, Christianity and Islam, and it is intermediate because it is a local or tribal tradition. However - and this is significant for Christian considerations - its view of revelation is universal in that it speaks of Yahweh as the creator and God of all men and women and the whole of creation. Hinduism shares materially the same three characteristics: it provides many Asian faiths the foundational ideas of karma, rebirth, its view of reality as “appearance” and

release as “salvation”; yet it is intermediate with its focus on and rootage in India; and its view of revelation is universal because it seeks to offer all men and women the right view of reality and path of release.<sup>42</sup>

When it comes to the relation of the two peoples of God who share the same Torah as their Scripture, we have to begin with the sad and long track record of Christian anti-Semitism. As early as the second century c.e., Marcion wanted the Christian church to reject the OT as canonical Scripture. The history of anti-Semitism runs from the church fathers (John Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine) to Reformers (Luther) to twentieth-century theologians (Karl Adam), to popes, too numerous to list.<sup>43</sup>

At the center of the tension between the two sibling faiths lies the obvious but important fact that “historically Christianity has been theologically exclusive and humanistically universal, while Judaism has been theologically universal and humanistically exclusive.” Christian theological exclusivism, however, is qualified by the equally important conviction that Christ died for all and that therefore, all people from all nations can be beneficiaries of this salvific work.<sup>44</sup> As long as the Christian church wishes to stay faithful to its canonical Scriptures, which include not only the First but also the Second Testament, she is faced with this continuing challenge, so eloquently and ironically described by the contemporary Jewish scholar Michael S. Kogan: “how to be faithful to the New Testament command to witness for Christ to all peoples and to convert all nations, while, at the same time, affirming the ongoing validity of the covenant between God and Israel via Abraham and Moses. Can the church have it both ways?”<sup>45</sup>

The Jewish conviction of being the elected people is based on Torah, which speaks of the covenant struck between Yahweh and Israel. However, if the people of God do not adhere to the covenant, its benefits may be lost. On the other hand, from as early as the third century c.e., rabbinic Judaism has appealed to the Noahic Covenant as a means for offering the “way of salvation” to non-Jews.<sup>46</sup> This admission is not a matter of compromising Israel’s covenant status, it is rather to act in light of the universally oriented revelation. The Christian side faces the challenge of, without compromising the new covenant “struck” in Jesus Christ - because that is the message of the NT - not invalidating God’s covenant with the OT people. The contemporary Jewish scholar Michael S. Kogan poses the challenge to their Jewish counterparts: “Are Jews really ready and willing to affirm that God, the God of Israel and of all humanity, was involved in the life of Jesus, in the founding of the Christian faith, in its growth and spread across much of the world, and in its central place in the hearts of hundreds of millions of their fellow beings?” Kogan’s conviction is that the response of “yes” is inevitable from the perspective of the universal nature of revelation in his faith.<sup>47</sup> This kind of acknowledgment of the place of the Christian church in God’s economy of salvation is not something totally novel in Jewish history. Just consider the greatest medieval Jewish theologian, Moses Maimonides - routinely compared to St. Thomas Aquinas in Christian tradition - who surmised that not only Christianity but also Islam are part of

the divine plan to prepare the world for the reception of the message of the biblical God.<sup>48</sup>

When mutual trust is being established, mutual dialogue and common Scripture may begin with issues related to the discussion of current themes such as the implications of the divine Word as incarnate and the Christian “deviation” from the teachings of the First Testament. Is the whole idea of divine embodiment totally unacceptable to Jewish Scriptures? Kogan scrutinizes texts such as the walking of Yahweh in the garden (Gen. 3:9) or appearing to Abraham (18:1) and concludes: “For Jewish believers, then, the thought may come to mind that, if God can take human form in a series of accounts put forward in one’s own sacred texts, one would be unjustified in dismissing out of hand the possibility that the same God might act in a similar fashion in accounts put forward in another text revered as sacred by a closely related tradition.”<sup>49</sup> What about the implications of the shared *material* conviction that whereas in Judaism the Word of God is Torah, in Christianity it is Christ/Logos?<sup>50</sup> And so forth.

### **Common Scripture Reading as a Form of Interfaith Theologizing**

This brief consideration of the views of Scripture and revelation in other living faiths from the viewpoint of Christian theology has highlighted both continuities and discontinuities. Before mentioning them, it should be noticed that not only between religions but also within each tradition there are significant differences that must be noticed if one seeks a serious interfaith engagement. Keith Ward illustrates both of these aspects by placing side by side the Buddhist and Islamic views of Scripture and revelation. While these two traditions display significant differences from each other, there is also significant diversity within each of them:

Orthodox Muslim accounts speak of a direct verbal transmission by God; while Buddhists rely on very old traditions recalling the teaching of the enlightened one, whose own experience is the guarantor of truth. Within each tradition there is the logical possibility of a continuous range of positions between the two poles of propositional dictation and enlightened experience. While the orthodox tend to make claims for infallibility as strong as possible, other believers allow for the possibility of such an element and degree of personal experience and developing historical context that a degree of partiality and fallibility is introduced. It may be argued that this allows revelation to be considered as much more a personal interaction between human and divine, whereas infallibilist accounts treat revelation in a rather mechanical way, as the passive reception of information. Moreover, a stress on factors of personal temperament and cultural context may help one to appreciate the rich diversity of different traditions, and make possible a more tolerant and appreciative attitude to other traditions than one’s own.<sup>51</sup>

Significant differences between Christian tradition and other faith traditions highlighted in the discussion above include these: Whereas Christian - and Jewish - views of revelation are fully embedded in and in a genuine way emerge out of the historical process, in Asiatic and Islamic

traditions history plays no role. A related significant difference has to do with the lack of ethical-moral emphasis in Asiatic faiths whereas that is a key aspect of Judeo-Christian Scripture. The Islamic tradition is somewhat unique in that, on the one hand, a significant part of “submission” to Allah has to do with obedience to Qur’anic ethics. However, on the other hand, because of neglect of historical and contextual factors in the reception of revelation - as some leading revisionist Muslim critics are pointing out<sup>52</sup> - Scripture’s relevance to socio-political and ethical pursuit is vague. Other significant differences include “fundamentalistic” insistence on the infallibility of Scripture not only in Islam but also in Vedic Hinduism. This is related to the reluctance to engage critical studies of Scripture. And as discussed in some detail above, differs from all other traditions, the Christian doctrine of revelation is focused on and derives from the divine embodiment, the Word-made-flesh; hence, it is trinitarian through and through.

The understanding of revelation as historical in Christian tradition calls for more remarks. It not only distinguishes it from other traditions; it also poses a challenge and opportunity for Christian theology and the church, as explained by Lewis E. Winkler:

if one affirms that God reveals himself through history not only in Christianity but also other religions, much more needs to be done by Christians to answer questions surrounding the recognition, discernment, and significance of these outside revelatory resources. How can we differentiate the cultural, anthropological, and even demonic when dialoging with other faith traditions? In addition, how can we look more closely at history and see more clearly how it reveals important truths about God, his creation, and ourselves as human beings?<sup>53</sup>

Such discernment and recognition must attend to both similarities and dissimilarities - at times, even to the deep conflicts. An important theological question asks, Why do we have these irreconcilable conflicts in the understanding of revelation among the religions? and What do we do with them? Consider only Muslim and Christian differences between their understandings of revelation. Whereas the difference from Buddhism is easier to understand because of its non-theistic - or “differently-theistic” - nature, which naturally leads to a human-centered pursuit of release, even with Hinduism, Christian tradition has less of a hard time. The difference is because these two theistic religions (even apart from whether Hinduism is mono- or polytheistic) understand the divine so very differently. Islam presents Christian faith with a profound challenge as both build not only on a clearly defined authoritative canon but also, more importantly, on a personal notion of God who is the source and giver of revelation.

Unless one is satisfied with the naive pluralistic denial of differences that hardly does justice to any tradition, even to one’s own, a careful consideration of the theological implications of real conflicts is called for. It seems to me that Keith Ward’s response to this dilemma is as good as any: “Apparently, God has not given an unambiguous revelation and preserved it unequivocally from error. God has permitted many alleged competing revelations to have currency in the modern world.”<sup>54</sup> Isn’t that a reason to

maintain modesty and humility, without rejecting proper confidence, about the truth of revelation in Christ? Isn't that a reason to continue careful reflection on how to best understand the complicated relationship between the divine and human elements in the inspiration of Scripture and formation of the canon? Isn't that a reason to continue investigating the relationship between the propositional and symbolic in Scripture? And so forth. It seems to me the Christian doctrine of revelation, pluriform in nature, which seeks to negotiate the dynamics of historical and eternal, inerrant and fallible, infinite and finite, propositional and symbolic, "spiritual" and socio-political, may offer the best resources for such a continuing enterprise.

As Christian theology continues constructing an adequate theology of revelation and Scripture, gleaning from rich sources of tradition and from the wide diversity of contemporary global theology, it also is well served by inviting scholars and practitioners from other faith traditions into a common reading of Scriptures - every tradition's own Scriptures. This is an act of hospitality: "we" are opening our Scriptures for others to read and "they" are opening theirs. We are not only talking about how similar or different our theologies of revelation are; we are learning from and contributing to each other by reading together.

One of the theologically most promising initiatives in this respect is called "Scriptural Reasoning." It is actually a loose network of various types of international and interfaith enterprises that aim at helping scholars and clergy study sacred Scriptures together.<sup>55</sup> It was started at the turn of the millennium among Jewish, Christian, and Islamic representatives and has so far concentrated heavily on monotheistic faiths for the simple reason that they share much in common.<sup>56</sup> It is likely that soon Scriptural Reasoning will be tried among other religions as well. The strength and promise of these kinds of interfaith enterprises is that they not only study *about* scriptures, they study *scriptures* together.

## **The Qur'an and Bible**

### **Islamic Canon and Sacred Texts**

Unlike Hinduism and Buddhism in which the canon is either vast or hardly defined, but similarly to Judeo-Christian traditions, Islam has a clearly defined canon, the Qur'an. Linked to later exposition and expansion of the Qur'anic materials, there is also a huge and vast Hadith tradition that consists of the sayings of the Prophet and other sages. The sayings and actions of Muhammad narrated in the Hadith are not believed to be revealed, although they are inspired.<sup>57</sup> By the ninth century, as many as about 600,000 Hadith had been recorded, which were then condensed into about 25,000. By far the most important is the Hadith of Bukkhari; significant also are the Hadith of Muslim, of Sunan Abu-Dawud, and of Malik's Muwatta. Understandably Islamic tradition has brought about commentary literature, similarly to other living faiths. Especially the Sunni exegesis during the first Islamic centuries became famous for its meticulous and tedious work. Along with the mainline Sunni and Shi'ite schools, the mystical Sufi schools have produced an amazingly diverse devotional and mystical literary and poetic treasury.

The discussion so far has established the central role of Scripture not only in Christianity (and by implication in Judaism) but also in two major world religions from Asia. Not only is that true of Islam, but it is probably the case among all living faiths. Yet it is in Islam that Scripture plays the most profound role. “Out of the Qur’an arises the Islamic community, its law, literature, art, and religion. Perhaps more than any other religious community, Muslims are a ‘people of the Book’.”<sup>58</sup>

The Qur’an does not do away with earlier revelations, the Jewish First Testament and the Christian Second Testament, but rather considers itself as their fulfillment and correction. Similarly to Hindu conception of the Vedas, most Muslims consider the Qur’an as the eternal speech of God.<sup>59</sup> Again, similarly to Hinduism, the oral Scripture is the primary mode. What is interesting is that the term *Qur’an* in Arabic means both “recitation” and “reading,” thus embracing both oral and written aspects.

Unlike in Hinduism, whose *rishis* (“seers”) merely “hear” the eternal speech in the Vedas, passively, by virtue of having been cultivated spiritually to tap into the divine, the role of the recipient in Islam, the prophet Muhammad, is more than just a passive recipient. Hence, the usual nomenclature of the “messenger” probably says too little of the role of the prophet.<sup>60</sup> “The Qur’an as Scripture comes only to him [Muhammad]: it has penmen other than himself but does not come from their pens, nor is it *about* him. ‘Herald,’ ‘emissary,’ even ‘commissioner,’ would all possibly serve, were they not encumbered by associations that are too sentimental or too vulgar.”<sup>61</sup> Coward puts it well: “God is the speaker of the revelation, the angel Gabriel is the intermediary agent, and Muhammad is the recipient. Not a passive recipient, however, for God’s word acts by its own energy and makes Muhammad the instrument, the ‘sent-doer,’ by which all people are warned by God and called to respond.”<sup>62</sup> Mediator - the angel Gabriel, or at times, the Holy Spirit (Q 16:102), or the Trustworthy Spirit (26:193) - is needed because of the categorical separation between the transcendence of God and immanence of humanity.<sup>63</sup>

Unlike in the Bible of the Judeo-Christian traditions in which most of the divine speech comes in human forms, often embedded in the struggles of human life and in the events of history, and which often contain substantial narratives about key figures such as prophets and apostles, in the Islamic Qur’an “there is no notion of an inspiration from God that is then clothed and uttered in the best words a human mind can create. In the Qur’an, Muhammad receives a direct, fully composed revelation from God, which he then recites to others.”<sup>64</sup> While progressive contemporary scholars, mainly based in the West, acknowledge the personal, religious, socio-historical, and similar contextual factors in the formation of the canon,<sup>65</sup> orthodox Islam regards the Arabic Qur’an as the direct, authoritative speech of God conveyed through the prophet. In that sense, Muhammad’s role is critical and unique.<sup>66</sup> Unlike the Christian understanding of the formation of the canon as a centuries-long divine-human synergy, orthodox Islam rests on the firm conviction that the formation and closing of the Qur’anic canon was a divine act through Muhammad. Indeed, there is an old tradition

according to which the Qur'an is but a copy of a "Guarded Tablet" in heaven (85:22).<sup>67</sup>

The belief that the revelation of the Qur'an came to Muhammad directly from God does not mean that it all came at one time and in the form of dictation as it were. According to Q 17:106, "We have revealed it by [successive] revelation." Hadith traditions give vivid accounts of various ways the reception of revelation took place, including dramatic emotional states.<sup>68</sup> However, theologically it is essential to note that unlike the experiences of the OT prophets or the NT apostle Paul, these emotional and personal struggles were not part of the revelation and revelatory process in Islamic understanding.

Although in each of the living faiths their sacred texts were conveyed originally in particular languages - Vedas in Sanskrit, Tipitaka in Pali, Torah in Hebrew, the New Testament in Greek - in contrast the Qur'an insists that its original language, Arabic, is also its only "revelatory" language.<sup>69</sup> The Qur'an can only exist in Arabic, all translations fall short of full revelation.<sup>70</sup> The form of Arabic used in the Qur'an is of the tribe of Quraysh, that of Muhammad. Interestingly, stylistically it is identical with none of the known bodies of Arabic. Even the Arabic of the Hadith is different from that of the Qur'an. "The uniqueness of the language of the Qur'an has become a dominant element in Muslim orthodoxy."<sup>71</sup>

As with the Vedas and Tipitaka, it is the oral form of (the Arabic) Qur'an that is the most foundational and most authentic revelation. Beginning from Muhammad who was commanded by the Angel to commit revelation to memory and who then recited it to the first disciples, there has been an unbroken line of reciters (*ḳurrā*) of the Qur'an. As mentioned above, Islam holds a firm belief that great blessings come from this recital, not only in this life but also in the life to come. "The Qur'an is uttered to call others to it, to expiate sins, to protect against punishment, and to ensure blessings in paradise."<sup>72</sup>

Similarly to the NT, the Qur'an defines its main and ultimate goal as the salvation of humankind. It also often refers to itself as the guide (14:1; 2:185, among others). An extreme view of the infallibility of the Qur'anic revelation and words is affirmed by all orthodox Muslim traditions. Sura 11, which speaks of Muhammad's task as prophet, opens with this affirmation: "(This is) a Scripture the revelations whereof are perfected and then expounded. (It cometh) from One Wise, Informed" (11:1, Marmaduke Pickthall trans.). According to 2:2 "That Book, in it there is no doubt" (see also 5:15-16; 5:48).

The Qur'anic view of Scripture is understandably strongly propositional. That said, part of the Islamic doctrine of Scripture has to do with its "sacramental" nature, to use the Christian vocabulary. The Arabic term *āyāt*, which also means "verse" (of the *sūrah*), carries the meaning of "sign," to be more precise, a divine or divinely sanctioned sign.<sup>73</sup> Consider Jesus' miracles as "signs" (named as such in the Gospel of John, and understood as such in the Synoptics) as a material parallel.<sup>74</sup>

Not surprisingly the Islamic tradition has paid close attention to careful and authoritative exegesis (*tafsir*) of the Qur'an. Indeed, because the Qur'an

lays the foundation for and regulates all aspects of life and society, more is at stake in the hermeneutics of Scripture in Islam than with most other traditions.<sup>75</sup> As mentioned, in early times, the Sunni school excelled in a most detailed exegesis. The tenth-century Abū Ja'far Muhammad aṭ-Ṭabarī and the twelfth-century Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī are often lifted up as most brilliant commentators. While the former established the procedure of citing all relevant Hadith comments with regard to the Qur'anic passage under exegesis, the latter also helped move exegesis in a philosophical and rationalistic direction. The main difference between the Sunni and Shi'ite schools is that for the latter the imāms are also inspired (and perhaps even infallible), a claim strongly rejected by the Sunni. Indeed, the Shi'ite school has a strictly regulated theology of succession, which maintains that while all Muslims may understand the Scripture at the basic level, the authoritative interpretation comes only from the imāms who are considered to be standing in the line of Ali, the legitimate successor of the Prophet. Hence, this line of "apostolic succession" goes all the way to Muhammad via Ali. For a Christian observer, it does not take much imagination to see parallels with Christian tradition's deeply divisive debates about the episcopal succession and its relation to a rightful *magisterium*, the church's teaching office. Indeed, there is the notion not only of continuing inspiration but also (at least in some sense) infallibility attached to the office of the imām as Ali and his successors have received the "inner knowledge" of Muhammad. Again, reflecting some aspects of Christian tradition, it is not the differing exegetical techniques that make the difference but rather the deeply differing notion of succession and authority. The way of doing exegesis varies only in the Sufi traditions with their immersion in mystical materials and their use of Greek philosophical materials.<sup>76</sup>

Because of the nature of the Qur'an's divine origin - void of historical contextual factors and absolutely infallible - it is understandable that orthodox Muslim traditions reject the kinds of historical-critical study that has been the hallmark of the Christian - and more recently Jewish - study of Scriptures for a long time now. This is not to say that no such inquiry into the Qur'an exists; rather, it means that it is marginal and rejected by the "curia" and the masses of the faithful.

### **Qur'an as the Fulfillment of Revelation**

What is the relationship of the Qur'an's to other scriptures? This is a dynamic and complex question that calls for a nuanced reflection. Well known is the statement in Q 42:15 that clearly bespeaks universality: "I believe in whatever Book God has revealed."<sup>77</sup> The Holy Qur'an makes it clear that the divine revelation as guide is available to all nations (Q 35:24). The one source of revelation is based on the conviction that all humankind is of the same origin (Q 2:213; so also 5:48). Hence, the current "A Common Word"<sup>78</sup> project between Muslims and Christians took its inspiration from Q 3:64: "Say: 'O People of the Scripture! Come now to a word agreed upon between us and you, that we worship none but God.'"

To balance and complicate this openness and universality, there is an equally important principle of sufficiency and completeness in the Qur'an. The passage from Q 43:3-4 puts this dynamic in perspective: "Lo! We have

made it an Arabic Qur'ān that perhaps you may understand. And it is indeed in the Mother Book, [which is] with Us [and it is] indeed exalted.” Whereas the former verse states that it is the Arabic Qur'an, this particular book, that is the vehicle for understanding divine revelation, the latter verse seems to be referring to a “Mother Book” (also mentioned in 13:39) - a universal treasure of divine revelation out of which even the Qur'an is a part.<sup>79</sup> If so, this means that all the sacred books of the religions derive from the same divine origin. That would again bespeak universality.

On the other hand, Islamic theology of revelation also includes the determined insistence on the supremacy and finality of the Qur'anic revelation, something similar to the Roman Catholic fulfillment theology of religions. Sura 5:44-48 makes this clear by presenting the Jewish Torah and the Christian NT as stepping stones to the final revelation given in the Qur'an. Not only fulfillment but also correction and criterion, it is in light of the Qur'an that the value of other revelations is assessed. The obvious problem posed by this interpretation is that whereas it seems to fit well Judeo-Christian Scriptures, it has a hard time negotiating other faith traditions' revelations. I am not aware of any satisfactory solutions to this problem.<sup>80</sup>

A major challenge to Christian-Muslim common reading of their Scriptures is the common Muslim charge of *tahrīf*, usually translated as “alteration.” The eleventh-century Ibn Hazm is routinely named as one of the earliest Islamic thinkers who definitely established the importance of *tahrīf* as a counter-Christian tool.<sup>81</sup> The term *tahrīf* is used in more than one sense. At its most basic level, it refers to problems of textual variants and hence, the lack of the authentic original. It may also denote deliberate altering of the text - of which charges the most typical one is that Ezra had altered the OT text. And, then, it can simply mean a misguided interpretation of the meaning of texts.<sup>82</sup> A brilliant form of *tahrīf* accusation, going back all the way to the important fourteenth-century Muslim apologetic Ibn Taymiyyah's massive rebuttal of Christianity in response to the Christian writings of Paul of Antioch, is that perhaps the NT is like *Hadith* rather than Scripture.<sup>83</sup> In light of Islamic tradition, this makes sense as the NT contains not only sayings of Jesus but also his activities, not unlike the *Hadith* of Islam. The current *tahrīf* criticism of the Bible uses skillfully - and selectively - the insights of (Christian) historical-critical study in rebutting the truthfulness and reliability of the text.<sup>84</sup>

The dilemma of Muslim-Christian views of revelation does not have to do with the strangeness but rather the deep affinity between these two traditions. Both claim a strictly defined canon and both appeal to One God as its source and provider. Yet they differ dramatically concerning which one of the books is the ultimate revelation. To add to the complexity of this question, note the dramatic differences in understanding of the category of revelation in general and of the other party's revelation in particular. Clinton Bennett succinctly lays out this complexity - which, of course, is an urgent invitation to continuing careful dialogue:

In many respects, the conservative Christian view of the Bible as infallible and as inspired word for word is closer to how Muslims view the

Qur'an than to the liberal Christian view of the Bible as a potentially fallible, human response to experience of the divine. On the Muslim right, the Bible is regarded as so corrupt that it no longer has any value. On the Christian left, an attempt is made to understand how the Qur'an can be accepted as "revelation." One difficulty is that Christians who deconstruct the Bible are likely to transfer this approach to the Qur'an as well, which is unacceptable, even to more liberal Muslims. Yet despite each side's view of the Other's scripture, Christians and Muslims from both the "right" and "left" cite from the Other's scripture to support their views. Christians have their favourite Qur'anic passages while Muslims have favourite Bible passages. More often than not, when Christians and Muslims use each other's scriptures, they do so in a manner that ignores or refutes how Christians and Muslims understand the passages concerned.<sup>85</sup>

### **Qur'an and Christ as Living Word**

Muslim-Christian relations are plagued with great ironies. On the one hand, Islam is the only non-Christian tradition that requires the faithful to acknowledge and believe in Jesus Christ to be a Muslim! There is simply such a plethora of references to him in the Qur'an (about one hundred at least).<sup>86</sup> On top of that, the Qur'an contains references to and narratives about many key figures of the OT. On the other hand, because of the principle of "self-sufficiency" and vastly different hermeneutics from the beginning of Islam, the presence of common materials between the two books, the Qur'an and the Bible, have generated deep and irreconcilable conflicts.

As is routinely - and correctly - remarked, it is not the prophet but rather the Book that is the closest parallel to Christ, the center of Christianity. Unlike Christian faith, which is determined by belief in Christ, Islam is not based on Muhammad but rather on Qur'an and Allah. Neither Christ nor Muhammad in Islamic interpretation is divine, only God is.<sup>87</sup> Hence, it is in Christ's role as the living Word of God in relation to the divine revelation of the Qur'an that the deepest commonalities are to be investigated.<sup>88</sup> Rightly it has been noted that whereas Jesus in Christian tradition is the "Word-made-flesh," the Qur'an in Islam is the divine word "inlibrate."<sup>89</sup>

There are surprisingly deep similarities between the accounts in the Qur'an of the power of its Word and OT claims about the word of the Lord and NT statements about Christ as the creative word. Consider Q 59:21: "Had We sent down this Qur'ān upon a mountain, you would have surely seen it humbled, rent asunder by the fear of God. And such similitudes do We strike for mankind, that perhaps they may reflect." Again, similarly to the many functions of the Word of the Lord in the Bible, whether encouragement or healing or miraculous acts, the Islamic tradition speaks of the living words of the Qur'an:

In addition to its destructive power, the words of the Qur'an are also a positive source for healing and tranquility. According to tradition when the Qur'an is recited divine tranquility (*sakīnah*) descends, mercy covers the reciters, angels draw near to them, and God remembers them. Tradition also tells how one of the companions of Muhammad came to him and reported seeing something like lamps between heaven and earth as he recited while

riding horseback during the night. Muhammad is reported to have said that the lights were angels descended to hear the recitation of the Qur'an. For the pious Muslim, then, the chanted words of the Qur'an have the numinous power to cause destruction, to bring mercy, to provide protection, to give knowledge, and to evoke miraculous signs.<sup>90</sup>

The noted Muslim scholar Mahmoud Ayoub makes the startling claim that the Islamic notion to "live in the Qur'an" as it is faithfully and piously recited is a very close parallel to the NT idea of being "in Christ."<sup>91</sup> There is, however, also a significant difference here, aptly noticed by Mahmoud Ayoub, that whereas in the beginning of the Gospel of John the Word is not only with God but *is* God, "no one has asserted that the Qur'an is God."<sup>92</sup> In terms of the dialogue between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, one topic well worth careful consideration is whether not only the Qur'an and the Word but also the Jewish Torah would function as parallels, a topic to which we turn below.<sup>93</sup>

Having considered in some detail key aspects of a contemporary doctrine of revelation - in light of Christian tradition, contemporary global and contextual diversity, as well as in relation to four living faiths - part 2 will take us to the heart to which revelation points in each tradition (with the exception of Theravada Buddhism), namely, the concept of God or the Divine. While revelation in each living tradition has much to say about life "here and now," they all have as their ultimate goal "release" or "salvation," which, as much as it may have implications for this life, as is the case particularly in Judeo-Christian traditions, points to transcendence, something "final."

## CHAPTER 2: Jesus Christ and the Jewish Religion

### For Orientation to the Interfaith Investigations

The discussion of pluralistic Christian theologies of religions in the previous chapter was a fitting bridge to the current chapter, the last discussion in part I, which is focused on the relation of Christian confession of Christ to other religious traditions and their claims to truth and salvation. As explained briefly in the introductory chapter to this volume, the current constructive theological project utilizes resources and methods of both theology of religions and comparative theology. The former, when done from the Christian perspective, investigates the relation of Christian tradition to other faith traditions as well as the meaning of religion in the divine economy. That conversation rarely engages any particular interfaith encounters unless for the purposes of illustration of an example, nor does it usually focus on any specific topic shared between two (or more) religions. Comparative theology, on the other side, while at its best assuming results and insights from the theology of religions, seeks to investigate in some detail specific theological topics common to two or more religious traditions. Hence, the Christian and Hindu notions of incarnation would be a typical theme for a comparative theology approach.

The previous chapter, as mentioned, was an exercise in the Christian theology of religions, whereas the current one engages comparative theology. It will engage each of the four living faiths - Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism - with regard to some specific, focused topics of interest. Since religions are different, the topics arising in interfaith encounters are also different. Even with regard to a specific Christian doctrine such as Christology, Islam, whose tradition knows well the figure of Jesus Christ, and say, Judaism, which *should* know him but by and large just ignores Jesus, approach the encounter with Christian theology from a different vantage point. Similarly, the two leading Eastern religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, while sharing much more in common with each other, pose their own specific challenges and promises to that task.

Speaking of, say, Christian-Hindu encounter is a huge and in many ways both problematic and questionable concept, not only because (in this case), Hinduism, as is well known, is in itself a hybrid concept, a Western construction, but also because there are so many different Hindu traditions. True, it is much better and probably more useful when speaking of a theological exchange between two specific religions to try to focus on a limited topic than generalize about interfaith matters, just speaking of religions in general (which is the serious liability of the generic theology of religions). Yet, it still calls for much specification and limitation. Not all Hindus - any more than Christians for that matter, as the overly long discussion of key Christological themes in this volume indicates! - speak with one voice.

Hence, to make the discussion manageable and useful, the following interfaith discussion aims at severely limited, specific, and focused investigations. The topics have been selected with good reason to assume

they derive from the inner logic of the dialogue partners and, as mentioned, are based on their relation, if any, to the traditions about Jesus Christ.

The investigation seeks to consult the definitive and representative sources of each tradition. From the Christian side, the constructive/systematic development of key Christological themes above serves as the basis. With regard to Jewish tradition, whose authoritative Scripture is Torah, shared by Christians, the main dialogue partners are leading modern thinkers beginning from the nineteenth century who started engaging the figure of Jesus Christ, consulting also the great Jewish Medieval resources. Merely attempting an exegesis of key texts of Torah hardly leads anywhere; the contemporary Christian-Jewish dialogue has to listen carefully to the leading historical and contemporary interpreters of the Jewish tradition. The dialogue with Muslim tradition builds heavily on a careful study of key Quranic passages; that choice hardly calls for further justification. Furthermore, because of historical reasons, due to the emergence of Islam in the seventh century C.E., as a result of which a vigorous interfaith exchange took place for several hundred years, some of the key resources from that time and their interpretations will be consulted as well. Those debates happen to focus on Christology (and Trinity) and are thus extremely relevant to the purposes of this investigation. In the case of Hindu tradition, rather than attempting a systematic study of the philosophical Vedanta texts (of the Upanishads), which by and large are unknown to most Hindus, the “common Bible” of Bhagavad-Gita will be consulted along with some key historical and contemporary Hindu scholars of various traditions. With the Buddhist tradition, because of the lack of a definitive “canon” - the closest to which comes the huge collection, in the Theravada tradition, of *Tipitaka*, from which a couple of key writings such as *Anguttara Nikaya* will be consulted - some leading modern and contemporary Buddhist thinkers from various traditions will be engaged.

This chapter engages other living faiths with regard to topics relevant to and arising out of the previous discussion that also relate integrally to the dialogue partner. At the end of the discussion on reconciliation (the last chapter of part II), the question of the nature, role, and conditions of Christian salvation among religions will be carefully investigated. As mentioned, on top of that, throughout the volume short interfaith exchanges take place where relevant and useful. The results of those exchanges will not be repeated in these two chapters unless there is a specific reason to do so.

Because the affinity of Christian tradition with the mother-tradition, Judaism, is so obvious, that faith will be engaged first. Thereafter, it is natural to investigate the relationship between Muslim and Christian interpretations of Christ for the reason that, unlike other faiths except Judaism, the role of Jesus Christ is well known. Thereafter, the two Eastern traditions will be studied.

## **The Jewish Messiah - The Christian Messiah**

### **The Jew - Between the Jews and Christians**

When one asks the basic question of what separates Jews and Christians from each other, the unavoidable answer is: a Jew.”<sup>94</sup> This is the striking

way the Jewish NT scholar, deeply engaged in dialogue with Christians, Pinchas Lapide begins his book on Christian-Jewish dialogue on Christology. He continues: “For almost two millennia, a pious, devoted Jew has stood between us, a Jew who wanted to bring the kingdom of heaven in harmony, concord, and peace - certainly not hatred, schism, let alone bloodshed.”<sup>95</sup> Yet, during the past two millennia, another Jewish theologian, Susannah Heschel, reminds us, “Jews rejected the claim that Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Bible, as well as the dogmatic claims about him made by the church fathers - that he was born of a virgin, the son of God, part of a divine Trinity, and was resurrected after his death.”<sup>96</sup>

It is one of the grand ironies of Christian history that for the first eighteen hundred years or more, Jewish theologians by and large ignored Christianity and particularly its claim to Jesus as the Messiah. The irony is even sharper when, as the Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide remarks, there is no denying the existence of a “Hebrew gospel” in all four of the Christian Gospels as seen in vocabulary, grammar, and semantic patterns. Yet, we had to wait “till the twentieth century for more Hebrew literature about Jesus, written in the same land of Israel, by the descendants of the same sons of Israel who made up the original audience of all the sermons of the Nazarene.”<sup>97</sup> At the same time, until that time, “Jews’ perceptions of Jesus were predominantly disparaging.”<sup>98</sup> The few writings by the Jews on Jesus before that were mostly ignored by Christians, even in medieval Europe where Jewish-Christian disputations took place here and there. The most important early Jewish source on Christ, *Toldot Yeshu* (fifth or sixth century?)<sup>99</sup> radically alters the Gospel narratives and in general advances a highly polemical and mocking presentation. For example, Jesus’ miracles are attributed to sorcery or other similar forbidden sources. More irenic is the fifteenth-century examination of the Gospels by Profiat Duran, but at the same time, it argues forcefully that Jesus only called for adherence to Torah and refused to claim divinity. The genius of the argumentation of the leading medieval Jewish theologian, the thirteenth-century Moses Maimonides - routinely compared to St. Thomas Aquinas in Christian tradition - is that not only Christianity but also Islam are part of the divine plan to prepare the world for the reception of message of the biblical God. Maimonides’ assessment of Jesus himself is less complimentary as he regards the Nazarene as a “wicked heretic.”<sup>100</sup>

In the rabbinical writings - highly formative for most brands of Jewish traditions - there is a definite and direct rebuttal of the claim to the divine sonship of Jesus, “a blasphemy against the Jewish understanding of God.” The Christian doctrines of the incarnation, atonement through the cross, and of course the Trinity, among others, “remained alien to normative Judaism and taboo to the rabbis.”<sup>101</sup> That said, it is significant that even with the harshening of tone in later levels of Talmud, the opposition was less targeted against the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth and more against what was considered to be the Pauline Christology and the subsequent patristic and creedal tradition. That became the focal point of opposition, at times even anger among the formative Jewish writings.<sup>102</sup>

The Jewish appraisal of the NT claims to the miracles of Jesus is complex and complicated. They are routinely considered to be “magic.” The eleventh-century Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac’s judgment of Jesus as “magician” and a “perverter of the people” is an illustrative example here. That judgment is backed up by the (Jewish) extracanonical tradition.<sup>103</sup> An interesting point here is that, on the other hand, the Talmud states (in the mouth of a rabbi) that for the Sanhedrin, men are chosen who are not only wise but also “are well versed in magic,”<sup>104</sup> and that on the other hand, Jewish tradition is suspicious about an effort to establish one’s credentials on the basis of miracles since, as Deuteronomy chapter 13 remind us, a (Messianic) pretender may excel in miraculous acts and yet lead astray the people of God.

Somewhat similarly to early Muslim polemicists, medieval Jewish writers such as the legendary Rabbi Saadia Gaon (d. 942) in his famous “Book of Beliefs and Opinions” paid close attention to different christological traditions among different churches and came to the conclusion that it is impossible to arrive at a single, uniform picture of Jesus.<sup>105</sup> The subtext of this observation is of course not to highlight only the inconsistency of Christian theology of Messiah but also its self-contradictory nature.

In the aftermath of the Enlightenment, and with the newly opening opportunities for Jews to participate in the wider European societies, interest in Jesus emerged, partly to help justify Judaism as religion. Another famous Moses, namely Mendelssohn, hence painted a picture of Jesus as a thoroughly Jewish religious figure, so much so that, “closely examined, everything is in complete agreement not only with Scripture, but also with the [Jewish] tradition.”<sup>106</sup> Similarly influential nineteenth-century Jesus scholar Albert Geiger<sup>107</sup> and the famous liberal rabbi of Stockholm, Sweden, Gottlieb Klein, at the turn of the twentieth century stressed the thoroughly Jewish nature of Jesus and his self-understanding.<sup>108</sup> Encouraged by the Quest of the Historical Jesus and subsequent Classical Liberalism’s interest in the “real” Jesus, divorced from the layers of dogmatic and creedal traditions, the Jewish quest for Jesus as a Jew was energized. Differently from the “Jewish Jesus” paradigm, the first modern study on Jesus written in Hebrew by Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teachings*,<sup>109</sup> presented him as a Pharisee who “departed the boundaries of Jewish nationhood, implying that Jews who reject Zionism, end up like Jesus, as Christians.”<sup>110</sup>

There were two agendas or at least effects of the modern Jewish reclamation of Jesus. First, there was the task of correcting the misrepresentation of earlier Jewish sources: “During late antiquity and the Middle Ages, Jews had commonly caricatured Jesus as a sorcerer who had attempted to beguile the Jewish people and lead them astray. The modern Jewish scholarly reassessment stripped away such earlier misconceptions, restored respectability to Jesus’ image, and then reclaimed him as Jew who merited a rightful place in Jewish literature alongside those of ancient Jewish sages.”<sup>111</sup> Second, although the emphasis on Jesus’ Jewishness was in keeping with the Christian Quest, the Jewish search for the Jewish Jesus

also wanted to develop “a counterhistory of the prevailing Christian theological version of Christianity’s origins and influence.”<sup>112</sup>

It is interesting to note that among the Christian students of Jesus Christ, the recent decades have brought about an unprecedented interest in the Jewishness of Jesus, beginning with the first generation of the “New Perspective” in the 1970s. Conversely, it is remarkable that some contemporary Jewish scholars are now arguing that what happened with the rise of Christianity was not “the parting of ways” nor that Judaism is the “mother” religion out of which the younger religion emerged. Rather, both religions emerged simultaneously within the matrix of the Mediterranean world.<sup>113</sup>

### Is Christology Inherently Anti-Semitic?

The track record of Christian anti-Semitism is a sad and long chapter in Christian tradition. It goes all the way from the church fathers (John Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine) to Reformers (Luther) to twentieth-century theologians (Karl Adam), and includes even the highest ranking leaders such as numerous popes. “What one learns from this record is that subtle, powerful, essentially murderous inner-connections exist between Christian self-witness *and* theological derogation of Judaism *and* political oppression of Jews.”<sup>114</sup> Alone the destruction of Jerusalem by the Gentiles in A.D. 70, should have led Christians to reach out to their suffering Jewish brothers and sisters in sympathy and love - yet, it did not! In repentance and humility, coupled with sympathy and love for their Jewish brothers and sisters, the Christian church must take full responsibility for these violent acts and attitudes.

More than the acknowledgment of this sad history of violence against the Jews, there is a suspicion among many current Christian theologians that there is in Christian faith something that makes it inherently anti-Semitic. Particularly Christology has been named as the source of that attitude. These thinkers consider the New Testament and the way Christian theology has interpreted it inherently anti-Semitic. The most vocal among those critics is the Feminist Rosemary Radford Ruether’s *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*.<sup>115</sup> “Theologically, anti-Judaism developed as the left hand of christology.”<sup>116</sup> Ruether wonders if it is possible to confess Jesus as Messiah without at the same time be saying that “the Jews be damned”?<sup>117</sup> She opines that because anti-Judaism is intimately intertwined with the christological hermeneutic of the early church, the only way to purge it is to radically reconceive Christology along two lines: first, faith in Jesus as the Christ must be understood as proleptic and anticipatory rather than final and fulfilled; and second, Christology must be understood paradigmatically rather than exclusivistically: “The cross and the resurrection are contextual to a particular historical community.”<sup>118</sup> Hence, in this outlook, Jesus’ paradigmatic role should be abandoned in order to avoid a supersessionist Christology.

Ruether’s presuppositions and charges against the NT are sweeping and unnuanced. This includes ignorance of different types of christological trajectories and traditions and their complex and complicated development in the canon. A quick look at the conflicting and contradictory “results” of

the tradition-historical criticism of the NT should make one hesitant in making sweeping claims about causes of development of ideas! The Jewish scholar Thomas A. Idinopulos and Christian Roy Bowen Ward have offered a careful investigations of Ruether's claims and conclude that "the appearance of anti-Judaic thought in certain documents in the New Testament does not lead to the conclusion that anti-Judaism is necessarily the left hand of Christology." In this investigation they are looking carefully at the parable of the vineyard in Mark 12, which Ruether considers a showcase for inherent anti-Jewishness and the beginning of anti-Semitism in the NT, and they come to contest Ruether's interpretation.<sup>119</sup> A critical investigation of the seemingly most anti-Jewish passage in Pauline corpus, 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16 ("the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets"), another key passage for Ruether, similarly does not support her reasoning. First of all, the interpretation of that passage is full of problems and unanswered questions of which Ruether seems to be ignorant. One of her omissions is that in the Thessalonians correspondence Paul is talking to a Gentile audience rather than to the Jews; in Romans, Paul clarifies in no uncertain terms his understanding of the continuing special status granted to the chosen people. Idinopulos and Ward conclude:

It is difficult to understand how Ruether can conclude that "Judaism for Paul is not only *not* an ongoing covenant of salvation where men continue to be related in true worship of God: it never was such a community of faith and grace." It is only Gentiles, not Jews, that Paul characterized as those who "knew not God." Paul himself boasts of his Jewishness and can even say that "as to righteousness under the law [he was] blameless" (Phil 3:6). He never says that Judaism was a false worship of God; rather, he claims that a new righteousness has been revealed (Rom 1:17; 3:21; 10:3) which causes him to move into a new phase in the history of salvation. Nor does his acceptance of the gospel lead him to deny the holiness of the law (Rom 7:12) nor the election of the Jews (Rom 11:28). It is difficult to see how Paul is any more anti-Judaic than other Jewish sectarians such as those at Qumran, who like Paul, believed that God was doing a new thing in the history of salvation. Unlike the Qumran sectarians who expected the destruction of "Mainstream" Jews (whom the sectarians considered apostate), Paul hoped for/expected the salvation of all Israel (Rom 11:26).<sup>120</sup>

There is also an important difference between the time prior to and following the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, which according to common theological wisdom has to do with the worsening relations between the Christian church and the Jews. Whereas in the earlier part of the NT ("earlier" in terms of the time of the writing) such as most of the Pauline correspondence, there is very little in terms of attributing the death of Jesus to Jews, in the Christian writings after the disaster, motivated by Christians' desire to distance themselves from the Jews and so show evidence of alliance with Rome, the tone gets harsher. The apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* tells the crucifixion in a way that basically removes the Romans from the scene and leaves it to the responsibility of the Jews.<sup>121</sup> Even if the nuances of this common interpretation may be debated, it cannot be ignored as Ruether does. Yet another historical observation has to be taken into

consideration before passing the blunt charge of the birth of anti-Semitism of the NT. It has to do with the well-known fact that anti-Jewish attitudes precede Christianity. The Jewish thinker Salo Baron speaks for many as he states the commonplace fact that “almost every note in the cacophony of medieval and modern anti-Semitism was sounded by the chorus of ancient writers.”<sup>122</sup> This is of course not to absolve Christian of the guilt of anti-Semitism, far from that. But it is to put the question under consideration in a perspective.

My criticism of the unnuanced attribution of anti-Jewish attitudes to the NT, is not to deny the “hardening of attitudes”<sup>123</sup> toward the Jews in Matthew nor the quite negative presentation of the Jews in the Gospel of John (however the dating of these documents go). This criticism of Jewish people, usually their religious leaders must be put in a proper perspective. The Matthean critique of the Jewish people especially in the 23 chapter of his Gospel is not necessarily different from nor untypical of the harsh criticism of one Jewish group by another Jewish group at the time.<sup>124</sup> Even when the whole people is addressed, usually the target of the criticism is the religious and/or political leadership which is deviating from the will of God.

The NT scholar Raymond Brown reminds us that at first “there was nothing antiJewish in depicting the role of the Jewish authorities in his death: for Jesus and his disciples on one side and the Jerusalem Sanhedrin authorities on the other were all Jews.” Only later the passion narrative was “‘heard’ in an antiJewish way.” The change into the predominantly Gentile composition of the church of course was a main factor here.<sup>125</sup> Brown also remarks that a careful comparison of the Gospel narratives of crucifixion oscillates between making both Romans (Gentiles) and the Jewish authorities as responsible and executors of crucifixion.<sup>126</sup> Hence, it is an unfounded charge by Ruether that that John’s Gospel makes the blame of the Jews “very close to what will become the charge of ‘deicide,’”<sup>127</sup> namely, that the Jews are “murderers” of God’s Son - even though that accusation became a commonplace throughout history in the mouths of Christians!

The American Lutheran theologian Carl E. Braaten warns that, as an overreaction to compensate for long history of anti-Semitism such as that found in Ruether, Christian theology now “relativizes the gospel down to one of many ways of salvation, that surrenders the exclusive place of Christ in doing ‘theology after Auschwitz,’ and that lays the blame of hatred of the Jews on a so-called [Christian] *theological* anti-Semitism.”<sup>128</sup> In Braaten’s estimation Ruether ends up “throwing out the christological baby with the anti-Judaic bath in Christian tradition.”<sup>129</sup>

### **Has the Messiah Come?**

Moltmann aptly sets the stage for contemporary consideration of the role and meaning of Messiah between these two religions: “The gospels understand his [Jesus Christ’s] whole coming and ministry in the contexts of Israel’s messianic hope. Yet it is the very same messianic hope which apparently makes it impossible for ‘all Israel’ to see Jesus as being already the messiah.”<sup>130</sup> Hence, every Christian theology of Christ should seek to consider and respond, if possible, to the Jewish “no” to the NT Messiah.

The response of contemporary Jewish counterparts is understandable in light of the vastly differing views of messianism as discussed above in relation to Second Temple Judaism and the first Christians. Martin Buber formulated the Jewish objection in 1933 in dialogue with the NT scholar Karl-Ludwig Schmidt:

We know more deeply, more truly, that world history has not been turned upside down to its very foundations - that the world is not yet redeemed. We *sense* its unredeemedness. The church can, or indeed must, understand this sense of ours as the awareness that *we* are not redeemed. But we know that that is not it. The redemption of the world is for us indivisibly one with the perfecting of creation, with the establishment of the unity which nothing more prevents, the unity which is no longer controverted, and which is realized in all the protean variety of the world. Redemption is one with the kingdom of God in its fulfillment. An anticipation of any single part of the *completed* redemption of the world . . . is something we cannot grasp, although even for us in our mortal hours redeeming and redemption are heralded. . . . We are aware of no centre in history - only its goal, the goal of the way taken by the God who does not linger on his way.<sup>131</sup>

Many other Jewish thinkers have expressed the same sentiment. In the words of Schalom Ben-Chorin, the Jewish mind is “profoundly aware of the unredeemed character of the world,” which means that the “whole of redemption” has not yet taken place since the Messiah has not yet returned.<sup>132</sup> Behind the Jewish “no” to the Christian claim for the arrival of the Messiah is hence a different kind of concept of redemption. Rightly or wrongly, the Jewish theology considers the Christian version of redemption “happening in the spiritual sphere, and in what is invisible,”<sup>133</sup> whereas for the Jewish hopes, it is the transformation happening in the most visible and concrete ways, including the removal of all evil.

Without downplaying and certainly not dismissing this profound difference in understanding of what the coming of Messiah and the ensuing redemption means, Moltmann poses the question to the Jewish counterpart that needs to be asked here. This is the “Gentile” question to the Jews: “[E]ven before the world has been redeemed so as to become the direct and universal rule of God, can God already have a chosen people, chosen moreover *for the purpose of this redemption?*” Furthermore: “Does Israel’s election not destroy Israel’s solidarity with the unredeemed humanity, even if the election is meant in a representative sense?” All this boils down, says Moltmann, to the simple and profound query as to “can one already be *a Jew* in this Godless world?”<sup>134</sup> Another important counter-question - or to put it in a more irenic manner: an invitation to mutual dialogue - has to do with the one-sided, if not reductionistic, interpretation by Jewish theology of the Christian hope for redemption. As will be discussed in detail in the section on many dimensions of redemption and reconciliation, Christian theology is not bound to limit redemption only to the inner personal and invisible notion. Christian eschatological hope, focused on the crucified and risen Messiah who now rules with the Father and Spirit, includes the total transformation of the world, a foretaste of which has already come in this messianic age.<sup>135</sup> Yes, regarding the expectation and totality, a difference

still continues: whereas the Jewish theology discerns the coming of Messiah as the fulfillment of all hopes for redemption, Christian tradition - slowly and painfully, as the NT eschatology shows - came to understand the coming of Messiah in two stages. That difference must be acknowledged and honored but doesn't have to form a block to continuing dialogue.

Is the idea of God taking human form absolutely unknown to Jewish faith? While most Jews think so, there are some current theologians who are willing to look for parallels such as "God walking in the garden" (Gen. 3:8), or the Lord appearing to Abraham in the form of the angel sharing a meal (Gen. 18), Jacob's wrestling match with a man of whom he says, "I have seen God face to face" (Gen. 32:24), or Israelite leaders under Moses claiming that they "saw God of Israel" on the mountain (Exod. 24:9-11). The Jewish Michael S. Kogan draws the conclusion from these kinds of texts: "For Jewish believers, then, the thought may come to mind that, if God can take human form in a series of accounts put forward in one's own sacred texts, one would be unjustified in dismissing out of hand the possibility that the same God might act in a similar fashion in accounts put forward in another text revered as sacred by a closely related tradition."<sup>136</sup> This is of course not to push the similarities too far, the differences are obvious, particularly in light of Christian creedal traditions that speak of the permanent "personal" (hypostatic) union of the human and divine in one particular person, Jesus of Nazareth. But it is to point to the possibility for early Christians to make such claims while still not leaving behind the confession of faith in the unity of the God of Israel.

Over against the resurgence of interest in Jesus among Jewish scholars and the heightened Christian interest in the Jewishness of Jesus looms large the shadow of the horrors and crimes of the Holocaust.<sup>137</sup> It is a continuing task for Christian theology to come to a fuller understanding of how it was ever possible for such a horrendous ethos to develop in "Christian" soil. What Christian theology in general and Christology in particular must resist is any notion of imperialism whether in terms of political hegemony and crimes against the Jewish people as under the Nazi regime or in terms of "realized eschatology" claiming the eschatological glory and rule already now. The Messiah confessed in Christian theology is the crucified one "who heals through his wounds and is victorious through his sufferings . . . the Lamb of God, not yet the Lion of Judah."<sup>138</sup> This kind of "theology of the cross" makes it possible for Christian theology to tolerate and appreciate the Jewish "no" rather than assuming, as has happened in Christian history, that God has abandoned the people of Israel because of their reluctance to acknowledge the Messiah.

The Christian "yes" to Jesus' messiahship, which is based on believed and experienced reconciliation, will therefore accept the Jewish "no," which is based on the experienced and suffered unredeemedness of the world; and the "yes" will in so far adopt the "no" as to talk about the total and universal redemption of the world only in the dimensions of a future hope, and a present contradiction of this unredeemed world. The Christian "yes" to Jesus Christ is therefore not in itself finished and complete. It is open for the messianic future of Jesus. . . . This means that it cannot be an excluding and

excommunicating “yes,” not even when it is uttered with the certainty of faith.<sup>139</sup>

A systematic account of the redemption in Christ and its rejection by the people of the Messiah needs to be worked out in the context of the doctrine of reconciliation. Similarly, in the context of ecclesiology, the relation of the Christian church to Israel and the question of the continuing legitimacy of the rightly configured mission to Israel has to be investigated in detail.

A fruitful dialogue about Messiah and other corollary christological issues between Christians and Jews is meaningful only if there is mutual trust to allow both parties to represent their positions faithfully.<sup>140</sup> The challenge to the Jewish faith is to stop “constructing Jewish conceptions of Jesus . . . and try to confront Christian claims about him as we [Jews] actually hear them from Christians.” That said, it is also important for Christian theologians to acknowledge that the “Jews . . . cannot and should not see Jesus through the eyes of Christian faith, but . . . try to understand that faith in the light of” their own.<sup>141</sup> This does not mean that the Jews do not have the right to comment on Christian doctrines and views of Jesus; yes, they do. That is an opportunity also for Christians to learn more about their own faith. Nor does this mean that the Christians should refrain from presenting Jesus as the Messiah to all men and women, Gentiles as well as the Jews. Similarly, the Jewish counterpart should be granted the same right to defend their “no” to Christian interpretation.

Only such an encounter may also open up new ways of looking for thematic and material parallels in the midst of foundational differences. A patient, common search of both real differences and potential common themes does not necessarily promise “results” but is a process to which all believers, regardless of religion, are called. This is wonderfully represented in the following statement from the Jewish theologian Michael S. Kogan:

But Jews do not ask Christians in the dialogue to give up core doctrines. How would Jews respond if Christians who have problems with Zionism demanded that Jews give up the theological claim that God has given us the land of Israel? . . . [T]he divine bestowal of the Holy Land is a core doctrine of Israelite faith that cannot be given up for the sake of the dialogue or to suit anyone’s preferences. . . . Similarly, the incarnation and resurrection are essential experiences of Christian faith. In Christ the transcendent God comes down to earth as, in the gift of land to God’s people, the Holy One acts in the world and its history. These doctrines are parallel concretizations of the divine activity crucial to the respective faiths.<sup>142</sup>

### **The Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the Nations**

With his announcement of the imminence of God’s righteous rule dawning in his own ministry, “Jesus came to move the covenant people to conversion to its God.”<sup>143</sup> This, however, poses an open question to the Jewish people. Jesus did not do away with the first commandment but rather radicalized it - to the point that he let his life be consumed in the service of his Father and asked his followers to put aside everything that would hinder total devotion to his Father (Matt. 6:33). “How radically does the faith of Judaism take the first commandment in relation to all other concerns, even its own religious tradition?”<sup>144</sup> Christian theologian Pannenberg asks his

Jewish counterparts. Even though the relation of Christ's ministry, passion, and particularly cross to Jewish faith needs much careful consideration, as an expression of the capacity of God to bring good out of evil (Gen. 50:20), in the estimation of Christian theology one has to conclude that it was only after the rejection of his own people that Jesus' death on the cross made him the "Savior of the nations."<sup>145</sup> Ironically, the Messiah of the covenant people died for the people outside the covenant, in other words, the Gentiles. This is not to deny the validity of Jesus' death for the people of Israel; it is rather a *Christian* theological statement about the universal efficacy of the salvific work of Israel's Messiah.

Hence, decisive for the church's relation to the people of Israel is the delicate matter of putting the cross in a proper perspective: "If the church has developed an interpretation of the cross that sees it as the point of God's rejection of Israel, of Israel's rejection of Jesus, of the loss of Israel's inheritance, and of transference to the church, then it must reckon with the fact that Jesus died for the Jewish nation before he died for the scattered children of God beyond Israel's boundaries."<sup>146</sup> Ironically, had not the messianic people rejected her Messiah, "Christianity would have remained an intra-Jewish affair."<sup>147</sup> In other words: whatever universal effects there are to the cross of Christ has, those do not do away the fact that as a Jew he died for the salvation of the Jews, not only for the Gentiles. That said, Christian theology is convinced that "[w]hat began with Judaism must finally end with the nations, and Christian are the go-between,"<sup>148</sup> and that hope includes the consummation of the divine plan that "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26).

It is significant that the influential Jewish philosopher of religion Franz Rosenzweig in his mature work *The Star of Redemption* came to affirm the role of the Christian church in the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles.<sup>149</sup> The contemporary Jewish ecumenist Lapidé continues that reasoning.<sup>150</sup> Where the Christian theological standpoint focused on the universal and unique salvific role of Jesus Christ has to challenge this Jewish reasoning involves the idea of Judaism and Christianity as two roads to the Father. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). This is not to deny but rather confirm the biblical notion that "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:26). Nor is it to introduce supersessionism.

The cross as a cultural-religious symbol is highly offensive to Judaism.<sup>151</sup> The only exception in the twentieth century has been the appropriation of the cross by the then Eastern European Jews as the symbol of Jewish "crucifixion" in the hands of oppressors. However, even that picture is more complicated. In Eastern Europe, Jesus has not only been a symbol of the victim but of the perpetrator as well!<sup>152</sup>

What has contributed harmfully - and continues to do so - to the mutual relations is the "supersessionist ideologies of Christian identity" vis-à-vis the nation of Israel and the Jewish people.<sup>153</sup> The NT's attitude to the Jewish people and particularly the implications of the telling of the narrative of Jesus in terms of the conflict with the Jewish people, is a highly complicated and complex issue. To its own detriment and to the detriment of common

mission, rather than reaching out to the Jewish people in seeing the passion story of Jesus as the way of identification in solidarity with the suffering of the Messianic people, the Christian church has interpreted the passion stories of the Gospels in terms of hostility toward Israel.<sup>154</sup> In doing so, the church has missed the opportunity of seeing Jesus' death as a means of "bearing in his own body the judgment he foresaw as coming upon Israel, sacrificing himself as the Maccabean martyrs had done before him, on behalf of the people."<sup>155</sup>

### **The Atonement in Jewish Estimation**

An important task here is the comparison between Jewish and Christian theologies of atonement, a topic that, surprisingly, has not loomed large in the agenda of mutual talks. Both sides have much to learn from each other. The idea of vicarious atonement after the Christian interpretation, with a view for the salvation of the world rather than for the benefit of the nation as in the Maccabean martyrs' case, "seems strange and foreign to Jews who believe that the problem of sin had already been dealt with in the Torah."<sup>156</sup> This is because, first of all, Jewish theology does not of course hold to the Christian tradition's view of the Fall (in any of its main forms of interpretation) which would necessitate the divine initiative such as the death on the cross.<sup>157</sup> Second, the transcendent goal of salvation in the afterlife is not as central either in the OT or later forms of Judaism as it is in Christian tradition, even though the idea of divine reward and punishment after death is not to be ignored in Rabbinic and most other Jewish traditions. Following the Torah and its commandments, as the chosen people, and thus testifying to God's unity and holiness, is the way of "salvation" in Judaism.<sup>158</sup> That said, the Jewish Michael S. Kogan rightly remarks that it was on the basis of the Hebrew Scripture such as Isaiah 53:4-6 that Christian theology came to interpret the vicarious suffering of their Messiah.<sup>159</sup>

Hence, the search for continuities - in the midst of radical discontinuities - between the Christian and Jewish views of atonement is more than an attempt to find a pedagogical contact. It has to do with the material and systematic structures of both traditions. A complicating factor here is that even contemporary Jewish theology tends to operate with the Christian idea of atonement that is one-sided and limited, implying that it is mainly about "the shedding of blood" and sacrifice as well as focused (almost exclusively) on the salvation of individuals. In other words, the kind of trinitarian, more comprehensive and multifaceted ramifications in Christian theology, developed in this work and widespread in various kinds of contemporary Christian writings, seems to be unknown even among the most acute and informed Jewish interpreters.<sup>160</sup> The Christian side has much to learn about the complex and rich matrix of the idea(s) of atonement in Jewish and OT traditions.

There is no denying that particularly the early Christian views and early rabbinic views evolved in close connection with the Old Testament atonement traditions. The concept of sacrifice is one of the important connecting links between the two religions. It is of utmost importance for a proper understanding of the roots of Christian theology and salvation and

for Christian-Jewish dialogue to acknowledge the fact that, despite the reality that because of the popular myths of a god dying and rising to new life, “the gentiles may have understood Jesus’ death in such mythic terms . . . the sacrificial concept of Jesus’ death was not developed in response to gentile ideas but, rather, as a Jewish conception of the righteous one who reconciles us to God by his sacrifice of suffering and death.”<sup>161</sup> In both religions, sacrifice is an atoning act that also calls for human response.<sup>162</sup> The OT prophetic literature, which both traditions embrace, time after time targets worshippers who merely do the cultic acts without repentance, mercy, and works of justice.

How would Jewish tradition interpret such key NT statements as “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). In other words: “How can Jews understand the Christian proposition that Jesus Christ’s crucifixion is an atonement for the original sin of Adam that brings salvation to Christians and restores a condition of harmony for the world?”<sup>163</sup> According to Steven Kepnes, Jews may gain insight into its meaning through the lens of the biblical notions of purity and impurity, sacrificial offices and systems, including the rituals of the sanctuary, as well as the Temple. Reference to the Lamb who takes away sin, of course, is based on the slaughtering of lambs for the expiation of sins. Christ’s self-sacrifice also connects with the Jewish liturgical days such as Yom Kippur.<sup>164</sup>

Differences, however, are noteworthy. Even though Jesus may be called metaphorically the High Priest,<sup>165</sup> in Jewish faith the High Priest conducts the sacrificial act whereas in Christian faith Jesus is the sacrifice, the sacrificial Lamb. This is not to say that Jewish faith doesn’t know substitutionary suffering for others; of course it does, both in terms of the “Suffering Servant” of Second Isaiah and the righteous martyrs as during the Maccabean era. Still, the one-time finished self-sacrifice of Jesus after the Christian interpretation is markedly different from the continuing sacrificial cult administered by the priesthood in Judaism. Not only the finality of the sacrifice of Jesus but also its universality marks it as different from the understanding of the Jewish tradition. Jesus’ sacrifice, even as the work of the Triune God, is contingent on the relation to his person, a claim without parallel in Judaism and a stumbling block to its monotheism. The role of the Messiah in Judaism is to serve as the agent of reconciliation but not as the one who reconciles, only Yahweh can do that. Finally, a foundational difference has to do with the offer and object of the sacrifice. Whereas in Judaism people offer the sacrifice to Yahweh, in Christian theology (2 Cor. 5:17) it is God who reconciles to world to himself.<sup>166</sup> All this is to say that both differences and similarities should be acknowledged in hopes of better rediscovering the central meaning of atoning theologies of both religions as well as for continuing mutual dialogue and invitation.

One can see that Judaism and Christianity express the same basic ideas about atonement but in different ways. Their views about this idea do not create an incommensurable rift between the two religions, as it once may have seemed; rather, we find significant similarities that connect the two in spite of their differences. If the views of Judaism and Christianity are as

close as they seem to be at this point, then there must be hope that a comparison of their respective views will lead to greater understanding, new recognition of commonalities, and a way to mutual appreciation.<sup>167</sup>

That said, one must be mindful of the dangers of bad apologetics. The profound differences between the two religious traditions in relation to understanding of atonement should not be artificially softened nor eliminated. Rather, in the spirit of mutual learning and love as well as integrity of confession and identity, a new exploration of the possibility of the common ground should be explored. The search for the common ground does not mean denying either religion the right to share their own testimony or to try to persuade the other. This allowance may seem like an unfair admission to the Christian church in light of the fact that, unlike the Jewish faith, the Christian faith is missionary by nature. This, however, is the legacy of the message and mandate of the church founded by the Jewish Messiah. If God was in Christ and reconciled the world to himself, then the “ambassadors” are sent out to make the plea that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles “be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:19-20).

This also means that, rightly configured, the church has the continuing mandate to share testimony to Christ also with the Jewish people. This is not to ignore the unique and special place given to Israel in the divine economy. On the other hand, neither is this to deny the foundational biblical conviction that “there is salvation in no one else” (Acts 4:12), and the gospel of Christ “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:17).<sup>168</sup> The Jewish theologian Michael S. Kogan puts succinctly the dynamic tension facing Christian theology with its belief in Christ as the Messiah: “to be faithful to the New Testament command to witness for Christ to all peoples and to convert all nations, while, at the same time, affirming the ongoing validity of the covenant between God and Israel via Abraham and Moses.”<sup>169</sup>

At the center of this tension lies the obvious but important fact that “historically Christianity has been theologically exclusive and humanistically universal, while Judaism has been theologically universal and humanistically exclusive.” Christian theological exclusivism, however, is qualified by the equally important conviction that Christ died for all and that therefore, all people from all nations can be beneficiaries of this salvific work.<sup>170</sup> In order to make progress in this foundational issue, there is a challenge to both parties. Kogan formulates it well: if the Jews desire for Christians to affirm the continuing validity of the covenant after the coming of Jesus Christ, then the Jews are confronted with this challenge: “Are Jews really ready and willing to affirm that God, the God of Israel and of all humanity, was involved in the life of Jesus, in the founding of the Christian faith, in its growth and spread across much of the world, and in its central place in the hearts of hundreds of millions of their fellow beings?” Kogan answers “yes” to this question, and he is of the opinion that those of his fellow Jews who do not are no more “enlightened than those Christians who still refuse to affirm the Jews’ ongoing spiritual validity as a religious people.”<sup>171</sup> The implications of this complicated issue have to be worked out in detail in the volume on ecclesiology.

## CHAPTER 3: Jesus Christ and Islam

### Jesus in Light of Islamic Interpretations

Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate* sums up the general Muslim perception of Jesus: "Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion" (#3). That said, Christian-Muslim relations are plagued - and hopefully enriched - by a number of ironies. "It is a curious fact of history that whilst Muhammad has been frequently criticized in western and Christian writings, Muslims hold the central figure of Christianity in high esteem." Not only that, but "Islam is the only religion other than Christianity that *requires* its adherents to commit to a position on the identity of Jesus!"<sup>172</sup> Indeed, "[in] the Islamic tradition, Jesus (Isa) was a Muslim."<sup>173</sup> Hence, titles such as *The Muslim Jesus*<sup>174</sup> for an anthology of sayings and stories about Jesus in Islamic tradition.

Although Islam considers Jesus as one of the "prophets," a highly respected title in that tradition, and even attributes miracles to him, Jesus' role as teacher is marginal in the Qur'an. Indeed, what the Qur'an rather emphasizes is that God teaches Jesus "the Scripture, and wisdom, and the Torah, and the Gospel" (5:110). The Gospel (*[al-]Injil*) is a book given to Christ, and it contains guidance, admonition, and light; the Gospel confirms the Torah and Prophets (5:110; 5:46). In the Qur'anic understanding, Jesus has made lawful to the people of Israel some things forbidden before (3:50). The Hadith tradition includes a highly interesting parallel to the Gospel traditions: in the "semi-canonical" Bukhārī collection, in the book on "Hiring" (*Kitāab al-ijāra*), Muhammad is retelling the parable of laborers in the vineyard speaking of the time preceding his own times: "The example of Muslims, Jews and Christians is like the example of a man who employed labourers to work for him from morning till night for specific wages."<sup>175</sup> There are a few other parallel teachings in the Hadith tradition, including prayer resembling closely the Lord's Prayer.<sup>176</sup> This is an indication of the creative adoption of Christian influences by early Islam.

Miracles are of course known and acknowledged in other religious traditions as well. What makes Islam unique is that, on the one hand, the Qur'an does not chronicle any specific miracle performed by Muhammad since the miracle of the Qur'an itself - as the Word of God - is by far the biggest and most important miracle. On the other hand, the Qur'an recounts several miracles of Jesus such as healing the leper and raising from the dead.<sup>177</sup> For example, in Muslim Persian literature written in Urdu, Jesus' role as healer is remarkable, including but not limited to emotional healing of a lover.<sup>178</sup> The Qur'an also knows miracles such as shaping a living bird out of clay based on the apocryphal Gospels.<sup>179</sup> A remarkable miracle is the table sent down from heaven spread with good as the divine proof of Jesus' truthfulness as the spokesperson for God and the divine providence (5:112-115). Muslim commentary literature, poetry, and popular piety contains many different types of accounts and stories of Jesus' miracles which lead to a high regard for the personality and prophethood of Jesus. For the most well-known Muslim poet, the thirteenth-century Persian Sufi Jalaluddin

Rumi, the miraculous birth and life of Jesus with a ministry of miracles, including healings and resuscitations, also become the source of inspiration for spiritual rebirth. His highly influential *Mathnawi*, also called the Qur'an in Persian language, praises Jesus for his power to raise the dead and for his wisdom.<sup>180</sup>

The high praises given to Jesus as well as the acknowledgment of the divine proof of truthfulness, however, do not mean in any sense of the word that Jesus would thereby be considered divine on the basis of miracles. Miracles belong to the repertoire of prophets and they attest to their authenticity. Kenneth Cragg summarizes the meaning of miracles assigned to Jesus in the Qur'an in a way that helps Christian theology to put them in a perspective in relation to Muslim theology: "[I]t is clear that the Qur'an's attribution of unprecedented miracles to Jesus is not a cause of embarrassment to the Muslim commentators. On the contrary, from their point of view, since Jesus is a prophet the miracles which God vouchsafes him must be sufficiently great to convince those to whom he is sent. Hence in common with popular Muslim piety the commentators tend to exaggerate the miraculous rather than play it down."<sup>181</sup>

One would imagine, then, a deep mutual interest into the meaning of Jesus Christ. However, "The question of Christ's image has been a sensitive one in the history of Christian-Muslim apologetics and dialogue. One might ask whether it has ever been a real issue for dialogue. Most attempted dialogue in this field has been overruled by an apologetic or polemical bias on both sides." This is the way the Norwegian Islamist and Christian theologian Oddbjørn Leirvik begins the important study of *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*.<sup>182</sup> Behind this uneasiness is the principle of the "self-sufficiency" of the Islamic canonical tradition (Qur'an and Hadith). It simply is the case that the Islamic tradition presents a radically different picture of Jesus Christ.<sup>183</sup> That both the canonical tradition and the rich and variegated later commentary tradition speaks of Jesus Christ so much<sup>184</sup> can of course potentially build a bridge. But that tradition paints such a remarkably different portrait of the personhood and theological meaning of the Christian Savior, makes the dialogue an utterly challenging exercise. Not surprisingly, many observers are seriously doubting if any "practical results" could come from this dialogue.<sup>185</sup>

The ambiguity about Jesus has characterized Muslim-Christian exchange from the beginning.<sup>186</sup> There were problems on both sides. On the Christian polemical side, from the beginnings of the encounter a handful of arguments have persisted, often used in an uncritical and unnuanced manner against any Muslim interpretation of Jesus: (1) What the Qur'an says of Jesus is hopelessly distorted. (2) There are clear mistakes in the Qur'anic presentation of Jesus. (3) Muhammad received much of his information from either heretical or otherwise suspect sources. And (4) There are some elements of the Qur'anic presentations of Christ that are more "Christian" than supposed by the Muslims, including pointers to Jesus' divinity and the affirmation of his death on the cross.<sup>187</sup> A typical Muslim engagement for a long time was to add to the existing references in the Qur'an and Hadith mainly on the basis of Christian legends and Gospel materials, including

Gospels not ratified by Christians, especially the *Gospel of Barnabas*, whose influence even today is immense in anti-Christian polemics.<sup>188</sup> This development culminated in the mystical Sufi spirituality and continues. Some contemporary Muslim theologians have also utilized historical critical tools of NT studies to make their point of discrediting key christological beliefs.<sup>189</sup>

Although a serious dialogue has to acknowledge and carefully weigh these kinds of challenges, the reasons for continuing and deepening Muslim-Christian dialogue are integrally related to the matrix of both traditions. In this exchange more is at stake than just the need to make a pedagogical contact for the sake of better relations:

Christology is the heart of Christian theology, and must be taken seriously as a central point of reference in the self-understanding of the Church. For the Church, there is a need continually to rethink the question of Christology in an Islamic context - as part of the more general task of a contextualized theology.

Christology is in fact dealt with as an issue from the Muslim side - both in Muslim polemics, medieval and modern, and in more dialogical contributions from Muslims.

Christology is not an isolated subject, but touches upon fundamental issues in anthropology and theology as well as in ethics. This is true both for Christians and, in a different sense, for Muslims.<sup>190</sup>

#### **On the Conditions of a Dialogue**

In order to put the dialogue about Jesus Christ in this particular case in a proper perspective, it has to be noted that in many ways it is not fair nor useful to compare Jesus Christ to Muhammad. First of all, even though Christ is of course named a “prophet”,<sup>191</sup> in the Qur’an, it is Muhammad who is the “seal of the prophets” and thus occupies a unique role. That said, unlike Christian faith, which is determined by belief in Christ, Islam is not based on Muhammad but rather on Qur’an and Allah. Neither Christ nor Muhammad in Islamic interpretation is divine, only God is.<sup>192</sup> The closest parallel to Christ in Islamic faith could be found in Christ’s role as the living Word of God, in relation to the divine revelation of the Qur’an.<sup>193</sup> (In terms of the dialogue between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, a topic well worth careful consideration would be whether not only the Qur’an and the Word but also the Jewish Torah would function as parallels.<sup>194</sup>) However, it is also important to note that in the Hadith collections, a number of sayings seek to clarify the relation between Muhammad and Jesus. Among them is the important, oft-quoted highly respectful statement by Muhammad of Jesus: “Prophets are brothers in faith, having different mothers. Their religion, is however, one and there is no Apostle between us (between me and Jesus Christ).”<sup>195</sup> As is well known, Muhammad’s own relation to Christianity and Christian tradition in general, especially in the early phases of his career, were fairly positive and constructive.<sup>196</sup>

Because neither the person nor the work of Christ is in any way as central to Islam as to Christianity, the portrayal of Jesus in the Qur’an is set in a different context.<sup>197</sup> Jesus is put in the line of a number of OT prophets beginning from Moses and Abraham. Furthermore, Mary’s role is much

more prominent in the Qur'anic presentation. Both of the two main suras that contain the most references to Jesus, 3 and 19, are named after Mary.<sup>198</sup> Even the fact that Jesus is a miracle-worker in the Qur'an, unlike Muhammad, does not imply that therefore he should be lifted up higher than the Prophet of Islam; the miracles wrought by Jesus are similar to those performed by Moses and other such forerunners of Muhammad.<sup>199</sup> In other words, the most the miracles can do for Jesus is to confirm his prophetic status but not his divinity.<sup>200</sup> Even the fact that Jesus is described as sinless in Hadith and legendary tradition whereas it is not quite certain if Muhammad is - although in the Shi'ite tradition all imams are! - does not make Jesus superior.

Along with post-Enlightenment Christian theology's heightened focus on the humanity of Jesus Christ vis-à-vis the divinity in tradition, contemporary Muslim interpreters of Jesus Christ have similarly come to appreciate the humanity in a more profound sense. Of course, it has to be noted that Muslims never did interpret Jesus Christ as divine; however, in the Middle Ages, among the Muslim thinkers there was often a more elevated picture of Jesus as a prophet. The Pakistani-born Anglican bishop of the Church of England, Michael Nazir-Ali makes the pointed remark that many of the traditional and contemporary Islamic Christologies seem to find a lot in common with Christian interpretations of Jesus that work with "low Christology," basically reducing Jesus' significance to his role as a human person.<sup>201</sup> The American Jesus Seminar's view of Jesus would be an example.

Of course, the Qur'an contains nothing like the NT Gospel narratives. Instead, there are a number of references to key events in Jesus' life from conception to earthly ministry to death/resurrection to his eschatological future (the last theme is dealt with in much more detail in Hadith tradition). The eschatological allusions are hardly clear, yet they are highly meaningful to both religions. Especially 4:159 is open to many interpretations depending on how to interpret the events of the cross and resurrection, to be discussed in the context of the Work of Christ.

The only title that is uniquely reserved for Jesus in the Muslim tradition is Messiah (e.g., 4:171). It is, however, difficult to determine the distinctively Islamic interpretation of that term. It is significant that the very same surah also names Jesus as "a spirit from Him" (God, obviously). Christian theology has been aware of and interested in Muslim interpretations of this important passage; John of Damascus of the seventh century, in his last chapter of *De Haeresibus* (*On the Heresies*) contains a discussion of this passage.<sup>202</sup>

In Christian tradition, of course, Messiah, the Anointed One, is integrally connected with the Spirit of God. As said, the connection, if any, in Muslim tradition, is an unresolved question. What is clear is the direct linking in the Qur'an with the life-giving power of creation (as in connection with Adam in 15:29). "Christ himself is seen as a creation of the life-giving spirit, but at the same time as a privileged vehicle of the spirit, aided by the Holy Spirit in his mighty signs (2.253)."<sup>203</sup> Although it would be tempting to read these and similar descriptions, which have clear Christian parallels, through the

lens of Christian theology, the warning by the Finnish NT scholar Heikki Räisänen is worth hearing: “The Qur’an must be explained by the Qur’an and not by anything else.”<sup>204</sup> Hence, in the Qur’anic interpretation, “Jesus became an example and a precursor of Muhammad, a guarantor of Muhammad’s message who had experienced similar things.”<sup>205</sup> Ultimately, the highest status granted to Jesus in the Qur’an is the “highest” predecessor of Muhammad - something like the Baptist to Jesus himself!<sup>206</sup> That said, Räisänen cautiously finds parallels between some NT portraits of Jesus and Jesus in Qur’an. The Lukan Christology with the focus on subordination of Jesus to God as exemplified in his voluntary submission under God’s plan (Acts 2:22-23) and servanthood (Acts 3:13; 4:27) provides such parallels.<sup>207</sup>

A tempting way to try to ease the tension between two vastly different portraits of Jesus in these two religions would be to “water down” the NT account of Jesus - for the sake of the dialogue. The classic work in Christian-Muslim relations by Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* warns of that orientation. It recommends that for the sake of a genuine dialogue, Christians should present Jesus to Muslims in the fullness of his personality as it is revealed in the Gospels.<sup>208</sup> This means that Christians are required to present Jesus to Muslims in the fullness of both his humanity and his divinity. “To concentrate only on elements in Jesus that Muslims can at once accept is to fail Jesus himself,” Cragg asserts.<sup>209</sup> Thus, to be content with only Jesus the prophet-teacher would not do justice to the Muslim’s need.<sup>210</sup> Beginning with the NT narrative of Jesus is to help Muslims stand at the same experience of the first disciples. Of course, “A simple reassertation of the Christian doctrine of Christ will not suffice,” without a conscious effort to face honestly the difficulties Muslims face in trying to understand the Christian interpretation.<sup>211</sup>

For the sake of a fruitful dialogue, both parties face the challenge. Here the recommendation from the Roman Catholic Hans Küng is worth following. Beginning from the narrative of the historical Jesus of the Gospels, he reminds us of the need to acknowledge the difference between Christian and Islamic interpretations. He advises Christians not to read Christian meanings into the Qur’an:

The Qur’an should be interpreted *from the standpoint of the Qur’an*, not from that of the New Testament or the Council of Nicaea or Jungian psychology. For the Qur’an, Jesus is a prophet, a great prophet, like Abraham, Noah, and Moses - but nothing more. And just as in the New Testament John the Baptist is Jesus’ precursor, so in the Qur’an Jesus is the precursor - and highly encouraging example - for Muhammad.<sup>212</sup>

On the other hand, Küng advises Muslims to evaluate Jesus on the basis of the historical sources of the Gospels: “If we on the Christian side make an effort to reevaluate Muhammad on the basis of Islamic sources, especially the Qur’an, we also hope that for their part the Muslims will eventually be prepared to move toward *a reevaluation of Jesus of Nazareth on the basis of historical sources* (namely the Gospels) as many Jews have already been doing.”<sup>213</sup> The implication that the Qur’an gives a faulty picture of Jesus, however, is a deeply troubling challenge to devout Muslims. It goes way beyond the unwillingness to reconsider one’s own

interpretative framework. The American-based leading Muslim thinker Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in dialogue with Küng, made this point in a most pointed way: “To suggest that the Qur’ān had the wrong Christology makes absolutely impossible any dialogue with Islam. . . . It must always be remembered that for Muslims the Qur’ān, the whole Qur’ān, and not only parts of it, is the Word of God.”<sup>214</sup> Against Küng’s historical interpretation of Muhammad’s prophecy, Nasr says:

One should be very clear on this point and on the role of the Prophet in the process of the revelation of the Sacred Text. It is because of this Islamic belief in the nature of the Qur’ān as the direct Word of God that any consideration of the Prophet of Islam as having learnt this view of sacred history and Christology from Jewish and Christian sources is the greatest blasphemy in the eyes of Muslims.<sup>215</sup>

### The Divinity of Jesus

The proper place to begin to consider the theme of the deity of Jesus in Islam is to be reminded of the foundational belief in Islam according to which Muhammad is not divine but human. The thirteenth-century Egyptian Al-Busiri’s poem *Qasidah Burdah* makes the point in a polemical way:

Renounce what the Christians claim concerning their prophet,  
Then praise him [Prophet Muhammad] as you will, and with all your heart.  
For although he was of human nature,  
He was the best of humanity without exception.<sup>216</sup>

A contemporary Muslim scholar sets the question of the divine sonship and deity of Jesus in proper perspective: “Jesus the ‘Christ,’ the ‘eternal logos,’ the ‘Word made flesh,’ the ‘Only Begotten Son of God’ and second person of the trinity has been the barrier separating the two communities [Muslims and Christians].”<sup>217</sup> This judgment is consonant with Muslim tradition going back to the beginnings. Take one example from the highly respected twelfth-century medieval figure of Al-Ghazali: in his celebrated *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*,<sup>218</sup> he bluntly speaks of “errors” of Christians who say of ‘Isa (Jesus) that “he is God.” Saying this is similar to looking into the mirror and imagining that the colors seen are the colors of the mirror itself!<sup>219</sup>

When investigating this issue, it is hard to establish exactly how much early Muslim thinkers know of the details of established orthodox tradition when beginning to engage Christian claims about Jesus and the Trinity.<sup>220</sup> On the Christian side, the first Christian writer, John of Damascus (d. 749 C.E.), in *dār al-islām* showed an extensive understanding of Islam and its main beliefs. Two of John’s writings contain an account on Islam: “The Heresy of the Ishmaelites,” in his *De Haeresibus (On Heresies)*, and *Disputatio Saraceni et Christiani (Dialogue with a Saracen)*.<sup>221</sup> One striking point in John’s account is his perception of the Qur’anic Christology. In his *On Heresies*, John shows an accurate awareness of the Qur’an’s portrait of Jesus. He knew well what the Qur’an affirms about Christ, such as that “Christ is a Word of God and His Spirit (Qur’an 4:169),” that Christ “was born without seed from Mary, the sister of Moses and Aaron (Qur’an 19:29),” and that Christ is “a prophet and a servant of God (Qur’an 43:59).” John was also aware of the Qur’an’s denial of Jesus’ crucifixion. Thus,

according to the Qur'an, John affirms, the Jews "crucified Him in appearance only (Qur'an 4:156); but the Christ Himself was not crucified, nor did He die, for God took Him into heaven unto Himself (Qur'an 4:156) because He loved Him."<sup>222</sup> In *Dialogue with a Saracen*, John used this Qur'anic account of Christ, especially the two titles that the Qur'an uses to describe Jesus - God's Word and His Spirit - to defend and prove Jesus' divinity.<sup>223</sup> A complicating factor here is that Christian tradition did not of course always speak in one voice - even after Chalcedon. By the time of the rise of Islam, especially the Eastern Christian tradition was deeply divided into different groups and orientations, some affirming, others resisting or revising key Chalcedonian formulae.<sup>224</sup>

As mentioned above, the virgin birth of Jesus is affirmed in the Qur'an in many places. Two aspects of that discussion are relevant to the consideration of Jesus' divinity. According to Qur'an 21:91 God "breathed into Mary and caused her to become pregnant with Jesus."<sup>225</sup> The second is related to God's *word* which, according to the Qur'an, God cast (sent forth) to Mary. Although the Qur'anic *tafsir* does not speak in one voice about many details in these accounts, including the exact meaning of the reference of "Our spirit," whether to the angel Gabriel or God, and the relation of the "spirit" here to the Qur'anic reference where Jesus is called "a spirit from Him" (4:171), from the point of view of Christian theology the idea of the agency of the divine Spirit in the virgin conception is significant. Alongside the Spirit, there is also a reference to the word in the conception of Jesus. In one of the most significant passages about Jesus in the Qur'an, 4:171, the reference to "spirit" and the coming of Jesus as the "word" are connected: "The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him."<sup>226</sup> Again, there are exegetical debates in the Islamic *tafsir*, not least concerning the meaning of the word being "conveyed" and, of course, the meaning of the term "word" in itself in reference to Jesus. Notwithstanding those debates, from the perspective of Christian theology, two important points follow: first, the linking of the coming of Jesus into the world via the agency of the Spirit and Word as well as the birth of Jesus through the pure, obedient virgin Mary without the intervention of a male parent. Those two, however, should be put in a perspective. No more than similar statements in Christian theology, do these Muslim references seek to establish the divinity of Jesus. They are meant to speak of a high status as a religious figure of Jesus, the Son of Mary. It is important to remember that in the very same passages in the Qur'an (4:171) in which the reference to the Spirit and Word occur, there is also one of the strongest denials of the Trinity and the divine sonship of Jesus: "So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not "Three" - Cease! (it is) better for you! - Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from His Transcendent Majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender."

Although assumed everywhere, there is only a handful direct references to the Christian claim of Jesus as the Son of God and his divinity in the Qur'an. It bluntly denies those claims (4:171; 5:17, 72, 73, 116; 9:30;

19:35).<sup>227</sup> A related Qur'anic denial is the idea that Allah had a son (2:116; 4:171; 10:68; 17:111; 18:4; 19:35, 88; 21:26; 23:91; 39:4; 43:81; 72:3). The main arguments in these passages for not having a Son is God's transcendence and the fact that Allah already possesses everything that is in the world: "He hath no needs! His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth" (10:68). In general the idea of God begetting is denied at the outset (37:152; 112:3, among others). The idea of sonship is also denied in the Qur'an because it was seen linked with Allah having a consort (6:101 among others).

### Incarnation

To the credit of early Muslim polemicists and commentators it has to be acknowledged that they were fairly well aware of the many different interpretations and nuances among various Christian interpretations of incarnation. Indeed, these early Muslim thinkers often considered the nuances in Christian interpretations more carefully than usually happens in contemporary debates as Muslims tend to treat Christian interpretations of Christ without much nuancing between very different types. In the past, the three Christian "schools" of Melkites, Nestorians, and Jacobites were carefully analyzed by several Muslim writers for their differences in negotiating the "two natures."

The Muslim rebuttals of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, as presented in the *anti-Christian* Muslim literature during the first centuries - in light of the Muslim understanding of what the Christian doctrine was teaching - can be classified under two broad sets of arguments:<sup>228</sup> First, incarnation is inconsistent with both Muslim and Christian Scripture. With regard to Muslim Scripture, on the one hand, Muslim scholars quoted Qur'anic passages which refute Jesus' divinity (e.g., 5:72, 73). On the other hand, the Qur'anic passages speaking of the mere humanity of Jesus (e.g., 5:75) were employed in this regard. When it comes to the Bible, the Muslim scholars devoted considerable attention to the sayings that speak of Jesus' humanity, such as his being the Son of David and Abraham (Matt. 1:1), he ate, drank, slept, traveled, rode a donkey, suffered, and died; similarly, his need to pray (Matt. 26:39; 27:46; John 17), his temptations, ignorance, and so forth, were included in this way of reasoning, as well as the highly contested claim that according to John 14:16 Jesus foretold the coming of Mohammed, the Paraclete. These were all meant to show that even with Christian Scripture, God-man incarnation is not compatible. On the other hand, Muslim commentators also downplayed the importance or Christian interpretation of a few passages in which they saw direct claims to Jesus' divinity.<sup>229</sup> Second, these early Muslim commentators argued that the Christian doctrine of incarnation is inconsistent with Muslim and Christian teachings at large. On top of this argumentation was the central Muslim idea of *tawhīd*, the oneness of God, which by default rejects all notions of not only incarnation but also the corollary Christian doctrine of the Trinity. *Tawhīd* was seen as taught not only by the Qur'an but also by the Bible, especially the OT (Deut. 6:4).

A related concern among Muslim commentators is the incompatibility of incarnation with God's transcendence, affirmed firmly in both faiths. The

idea of God becoming flesh violates in Muslim sensibilities the principles of God's glory and greatness. Hence, it is unworthy for a sovereign God to be human. According to the Christian Cragg, however, "the crucial question has to do with the nature of the 'greatness' we affirm."<sup>230</sup> "The question between us is not about *whether* there is God's stake in our humanity but *how far* it might go in what it entails within the divine power and whether what we have in Jesus might or might not be the measure of the answer."<sup>231</sup> Does the incarnation or the *kenosis* of God oppose God's greatness? On the contrary, Cragg argues, it is in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, that what Muslims desire to assert regarding God's greatness is in effect. It is in Jesus Christ, "God in Christ," that God achieved his intention toward humanity. "For is that sovereignty truly sovereign if it fails to take action against the empire of ignorance and evil in humankind?" Cragg asks.<sup>232</sup>

Furthermore, Jesus' physical conception and birth as part of the doctrine of incarnation were seen as incompatible with both Christian and Muslim teachings. A logical problem here is the exact moment of uniting of two natures, whether in conception or birth or afterwards. A final Muslim concern about the incarnation is that it involves itself in *Shirk*, the greatest sin of all, associating with God what should not be associated with him. By believing in "God in Christ," Christians are somehow "deifying" a creature, the Man of Nazareth.

Is there a way to negotiate or soften the impasse without unduly compromising the core teachings of both traditions? Kenneth Cragg has widely argued that one such attempt could be built to the central Christian idea of "God in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:19).<sup>233</sup> That idea, rather than the "Word made flesh" (John 1:14) may provide some stimulus and avenues for mutual re-thinking. He wonders if there is "not a Christian sense of God in Christ truly compatible with the Islamic awareness of divine unity?" And, he asks if, conversely there is "not an Islamic sense of Christ compatible with the Christian understanding of divine self-revelation?" The first response has to merely be that there hardly exists such a convergence. And more importantly, whether or not that can be found, cannot be based on anything else but the basis of "the inner authenticity of their respective apprehension of the divine."<sup>234</sup> If the reasoning is based on something else, it can only result in a poor apologetic and even a worse, "dialogue." Some have attempted to find the convergence in a forced Christian reading of the Qur'anic passages that speak of Jesus as "a spirit from God" or "a word from God," as discussed above. Muslim interpretation of those passages does not yield any divinity, and thus a Christian understanding of incarnation; even if, in an unlikely event, there could be found exegetical or hermeneutical reasons in the study of these kinds of passages towards a more Christian understanding, the theological structure and inner self-understanding of Islam hardly allows that.<sup>235</sup>

Instead, Cragg suggests that the idea of "God in Christ" - which can be expressed as "having been sent" from God (John 3:16) - may find a better hearing in Islam when related to the central Qur'anic idea of the prophets and the Qur'an itself as the Word of God as having been sent. "*Rasūl*, the 'sent one,' is of course the fundamental definition of the prophet in Islam.

*Rasūliyyah*, or ‘mission from God’ is the agency of the Qur’an on earth. Such *Rasūliyyah* is culminatory, in the Islamic belief, of a sequence of divine address to the human situation, though [sic] a long succession of prophets and messengers.” In other words, both religions speak of the divine mission, sending. With all their profound differences, Cragg surmises that the idea of the divine and human interpenetration is there, “and, in that interpenetration, the real involvement of the divine in the temporal and the constant concern about the genuine mandate of the eternal.”<sup>236</sup> There is both “human aegis” and “divine fiat” at work in here, somewhat similarly to the Christian understanding. Although Muhammad is always considered to be short of divinity, given his role as the “instrument” in the process of *Tanzil*, the reception of the Qur’an, the Word of God, “The Quran, as divine word, is intensely a human phenomenon, and takes its place in human history.”<sup>237</sup>

That Muhammad or even the Qur’an are not considered “divine” is not to downplay their unique mediatorial role for humanity to know God’s will, in order to “submit,” be a Muslim; rather, this hesitancy has everything to do with the protection of the source of revelation and sending in God, the unity of God.<sup>238</sup> It is of course ironic - and promising for the dialogue with Islam - that along with the doctrine of incarnation, affirmation of “God in Christ” because of sentness, Christian theology from the beginning had to fight against idolatry whether in the form of contemporary mystery cults with myriads of gods and goddesses or the emperor cult. Christians faith is strictly monotheistic as is Islam. This defense of monotheism, based on the transcendence and majesty of God, Cragg helpfully reminds us, “is far from being a divine dissociation from [hu]mankind.”<sup>239</sup> The Muslim idea of sentness of course confirms that Christian claim.

Although Cragg’s creative reasoning hardly convinces many Muslims, its gains are twofold. First, it helps continue conversation which, as mentioned, is not based on a cheap and useless compromise but rather seeks to operate on the basis of the inner logic of both traditions. Second, it helps Christians understand better the inner logic of Muslim monotheism and its relatedness to their own faith.

### **The Christian Theology of the Cross in Light of the Islamic Interpretation**

Not only with regard to the source of salvation but also, consequently, with regard to the means of salvation, there is a sharp difference between Christianity and Islam: “The cross stands between Islam and Christianity. Dialogue cannot remove its scandal, and in due course a Muslim who might come to believe in Jesus has to face it.”<sup>240</sup> One of the reasons why the suffering Messiah does not appeal to Muslims is that “paragons of success and vindication” such as those of Abraham, Noah, Moses, and David are much more congenial with the vision of God’s manifest victory on earth. Says M. Ali Merad, “in the Quran, everything is aimed at convincing the Believer that he will experience victory over the forces of evil.” Furthermore, “Islam refuses to accept this tragic image of Passion. Not simply because it has no place for the dogma of the Redemption, but because the Passion would imply in its eyes that God had failed.”<sup>241</sup>

The single most important dividing issue between Islam and Christian faith is the crucifixion. Muslim tradition does not speak with one voice regarding either what happened on the cross or necessarily even of its theological meaning. Yet it is true that “almost all Muslims believe that the crucifixion did not occur or that a substitute was executed in Jesus’ place (popularly, Judas of Iscariot fills this role). Jesus, then, did not die. Instead of dying, rising and ascending as in the Christian sequence of events, he was born, lived[,] then was raised to heaven like Enoch and Elijah in the Bible, without dying.”<sup>242</sup> Furthermore, the whole of Muslim theology unanimously “denies the expiatory sacrifice of Christ on the Cross as a ransom for sinful humanity.”<sup>243</sup> In Islamic view, such a sacrificial, atoning death is not needed because of the lack of the doctrine of the Fall and sinfulness as in Christian tradition.<sup>244</sup>

Christian theology has been aware of and interested in Muslim interpretations of crucifixion from the beginning of the encounter. As early as the seventh Christian century (the first Islamic century) John of Damascus, in his last chapter of *De haeresibus (On the Heresies)*, discusses the key Qur’anic passage (4:157).<sup>245</sup> Attacks against the Christian teaching of crucifixion have played a significant role in Muslim anti-Christian polemics and continue to do so as illustrated in the widely influential pamphlet by the Indian-South African Ahmed Deedat, *Crucifixion Or Cruci-fiction?*<sup>246</sup>

The Qur’an contains only one explicit passage to the alleged crucifixion of Jesus, 4:156-9:

(156) And because of their disbelief and of their speaking against Mary a tremendous calumny;  
(157) And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allah’s messenger - they slew him not nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them [or: “but a semblance was made to them”<sup>247</sup>]; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain.  
(158) But Allah took him up unto Himself. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise.  
(159) There is not one of the People of the Scripture but will believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them -

The most common interpretation of the Qur’anic account of Jesus’ crucifixion is that while it appeared that the “Messiah, Isa son of Marium” was killed on the cross, he was not; rather, “Allah took him up to Himself” (4:157-58).<sup>248</sup> By and large, Muslim tradition denies the killing of Jesus.<sup>249</sup> The typical explanation is that one of the disciples took his place and was killed while Jesus was taken by Allah.<sup>250</sup> This “substitutionist theory” is by far the most common view in Muslim commentaries and popular piety.<sup>251</sup> Jews, “the people of the book” (4:159) wrongly believed they had killed the Messiah.<sup>252</sup> When it comes to the verse 159, most Muslim commentators believe that it refers “to the still future death of Jesus, who had been raised alive into heaven and would return to kill the Antichrist.”<sup>253</sup> On the basis of 3:55 and 4:159, Jesus has a role to play on the Day of Judgment. The most common Muslim opinion is that Jesus will return to earth before the Last

Days, marry, have children, fight victoriously the forces of evil, and then face a natural death. Hadith teaches that in his return, Jesus will destroy the cross,<sup>254</sup> after all, the cross is abhorrent to Muslim intuitions. In sum: on the one hand, Muslim tradition denies that Jesus was put to death on the cross (4:159); on the other hand, it teaches that Jesus will die later (4:159; 19:33), but before his “natural” death, will return for a certain ministry.

When it comes to the crucial verse of 4:157, it is instructive to note that whereas John of Damascus simply dismissed the Qur’anic teaching that allegedly denies the crucifixion, some thirty years after his death, the Nestorian (Mar Timothy) Catholicos Timothy I<sup>255</sup> responded to the Muslim Caliph that Jesus died only according to his human nature. Timothy appealed to two important Qur’anic verses, both of which traditionally have been understood as making a reference to Jesus’ death (though, of course, not in the context of crucifixion): 19:33<sup>256</sup> and 3:55.<sup>257</sup> He believed that on this basis it was established that Jesus died and rose again. The Caliph’s response was something to be expected: Jesus’ death lies in the future.<sup>258</sup>

Christian apologetic has advanced two different positions as a response to the standard Muslim denial of Jesus’ death on the cross.<sup>259</sup> The first one is illustrated in Timothy’s position - as softly and ironically as he put it - namely, that the Qur’an is inconsistent in, on the one hand, affirming the death of Jesus (19:33; 3:55) and, on the other hand, denying it (4:157). The second apologetic way of argumentation has advanced the thesis that, indeed, the Qur’an is not denying the crucifixion. This position rests on three interrelated arguments: (1) Not only the two passages mentioned, but other passages in the Qur’an affirm the death of Jesus (5:17, 75, 117). (2) What 4:157 denies is the indestructibility of the divine nature but not the death on the cross of Jesus according to his human nature. This was indeed Timothy’s Nestorian position and this interpretation was also affirmed, for example, by Paul of Antioch of the twelfth century.<sup>260</sup> This reasoning is in keeping with standard Muslim view according to which the soul of martyrs is not really “killed” but rather taken up to God, and thus martyrs are “alive” with God (3:169). (3) On the basis of the biblical teaching that makes Jesus’ death a matter of his voluntary submission rather than something forced upon him by humans (John 10:17, 18), the Qur’an (4:157) is merely denying the arrogant claim by the Jews of having killed Jesus.<sup>261</sup> In sum: this second line of Christian apologetics is saying that indeed, the Qur’an is consistent and thus affirms the death of Jesus, at least when it comes to his human nature.<sup>262</sup> It is clear without saying that this interpretation hardly has convinced many Muslims.

Two major exegetical questions surround the interpretation of 4:157-58, namely, the meaning of “Allah took him up unto Himself” (v. 158) and “a semblance was made” (v. 157, following Robinson’s rendering). The former has to do with what really happened to Jesus if he was not put to death on the cross. The latter relates to the question of who, instead of Jesus, was crucified. Muslim commentary literature on these passages is endless, and Christian apologetics has also engaged them widely from the beginning.

The Arabic word *tawaffā*<sup>263</sup> means literally “to receive” but has been interpreted also as “to die” when Allah is the subject. Indeed, there are 2

times when this verb appears in relation to Jesus (5:117; 3:55) and 3 in reference to Muhammad's fate (40:77; 13:40; 10:46). It might be significant that in many current translations these three passages relating to Muhammad are interpreted as denoting dying, as in 10:46: "Whether We let thee (O Muhammad) behold something of that which We promise them or (whether We) cause thee to die, still unto Us is their return, and Allah, moreover, is Witness over what they do" (10:46). On the contrary, in both of the two cases in which reference is made to Jesus' fate, the literal meaning of "to receive" (or its equivalent) is used in translations.<sup>264</sup> According to Robinson, the Christian interpretation, which goes back all the way to the seventh Christian century, as discussed, making *tawaffā* mean death also in the case of Jesus, has some strong support behind it. The other remaining 24 references in the Qur'an are all in some way or another associated with death, along with the 3 instances relating to Muhammad's fate. Furthermore, even those classical commentators who as a rule denied the death of Jesus on the cross still acknowledged that normally the verb denotes death.<sup>265</sup> That said, Robinson contends that in light of the Qur'anic and commentary literature, the issue is still complicated and far from settled. The complications include the observations that only in the 5 passages that relate to Muhammad and Jesus, "the verb is used in the active voice with God as the subject and with one of his prophets as the object."<sup>266</sup> Whatever the final exegetical or lexical conclusion, Islamic theology has firmly settled the issue contrary to the Christian view.

Regarding the meaning of "a semblance was made to them" in 4:157, Robinson's conclusion expresses virtual unanimity in Muslim theology: "Despite differences of opinion about the details the commentators were agreed that 4:157 denies that Jesus was crucified. The most widespread view was that it implies that the Jews erroneously crucified Jesus' 'semblance' and not Jesus himself."<sup>267</sup>

Kenneth Cragg offers a comprehensive, highly nuanced judgment of the state of affairs when it comes to the dispute between Muslim theology and Christian theology regarding the cross and its meaning. The crucifixion entails three interrelated aspects, namely, "the act of men in wrong, the act of Jesus in love, and the act of God in grace." According to Cragg, whereas Muslim theology affirms the first two aspects, "[w]hat the Quran, and with it the whole corporate mind of Islam, denies is the third dimension, i.e., God's act. It is this which is totally precluded by every category of theology and faith." In order to bring home that point, Cragg pointedly expresses the Muslim judgment: "'God was *not* in Christ reconciling the world to himself': he was with Jesus withdrawing him to heaven."<sup>268</sup> That judgment is valid even in light of the fact that between the Anselmian focus on law and legal demands and Islam there is some resonance. In Islam, disobedience brings about punishment. However, the difference lies in how death is related to punishment: whereas in much of traditional Christian theology death is a result of sin, in Islam it is not, death is natural.<sup>269</sup> And apart from that question, Islam does not know the Christian kind of doctrine of atonement for others' sins.<sup>270</sup>

## CHAPTER 4: Yahweh, Allah, and the Triune God

### For Orientation: A Dialogical and Confessional Pursuit of God

The famed Harvard University scholar John B. Carman is daring to announce that he is “choosing to follow what some might consider an old-fashioned type of comparison: the comparison of ideas concerning the nature of God,” now that for many scholars of religions and theologians this approach has given way to the phenomenological, ritual, and social study of religions.<sup>271</sup> It is comparative theology that continues pursuing that line of questioning, namely, carefully assessing, comparing, and reflecting on the ways the living faiths embrace the notions of the divine. But even a casual acquaintance with world religions raises the question of whether comparing notes on the divine is an appropriate and useful way of assessing religions in light of the fact that Buddhism, in particular, may not be built on divinity. In support of the comparison, however, can be mentioned that while Theravada Buddhism - unlike Mahayana and particularly its branch, the (Japanese) Pure Land - intentionally seeks to shift the focus in religion away from the deities to highlight the primacy of each person’s ethical pursuit towards enlightenment - the Buddhist view does not entail atheism in the way the term is understood in the post-Enlightenment Global North. There are very few, if any Buddhists - and certainly Gautama would not belong to that group - who deny the *existence* of deities à la modern/contemporary Western secular/scientific atheism.

At the heart of comparative theology is the acknowledgment of a deep dynamic tension concerning religions. On the one hand, “[r]eligions generate infinite differences.” Attempting to water down or deny real differences among religions, as the “first generation of pluralism” seeks to do, is a failing exercise on more than one account. In this context, just consider how useless and uninteresting a task it would be to compare two items that are alike! On the other hand, “there is a tradition at the very heart of [many living] . . . faiths which is held common. It is not that precisely the same doctrines are believed, but that the same tendencies of thought and devotion exist, and are expressed within rather diverse patterns of thought, characteristic of the faiths in question.”<sup>272</sup> Add to this the obvious fact that religions are living processes that develop, re-shape, and re-configure over the years and that within any major living tradition differences and diversities are sometimes as dramatic as between some religions.<sup>273</sup> With this dynamic in mind, for the comparative theological inquiry into the nature and existence of God to be meaningful it must be dialogical and “conversational,”<sup>274</sup> an honest mutual encounter that also may lead to “mutual transformation,” as John B. Cobb has famously argued.<sup>275</sup>

Dialogical, however, does not mean that therefore - after comparative *religions* - a disinterested, “neutral” investigation is attempted. Theology is confessional by nature, on all sides. “Dialogue must permanently shape the whole theological environment, but dialogue is not the primary goal of theology, which still has to do with the articulation of the truths one believes and the realization of a fuller knowledge of God (insofar as that is possible

by way of theology). Both within traditions and across religious boundaries, truth does matter, conflicts among claims about reality remain significant possibilities, and making a case for the truth remains a key part of the theologian's task."<sup>276</sup> Hence, following the Catholic comparativist Clooney, this project envisions "Theology as an Interreligious, Comparative, Dialogical, and *Confessional* Enterprise."<sup>277</sup>

That kind of task can only be attempted in the spirit of hospitality. The postcolonialist feminist Mayra Rivera reminds us that "[we] constantly fail to encounter the other as Other. Time and again we ignore or deny the singularity of the Other - we don't see even when the face stands in front of us. We still need, it seems, 'eyes to see and ears to hear' - and bodies capable of embracing without grasping."<sup>278</sup> What makes hospitality such a fitting metaphor for interfaith relations is that it "involves invitation, response and engagement."<sup>279</sup> True hospitality helps us avoid "bearing false witness."<sup>280</sup> Hospitality reaches out, makes room, facilitates dialogue. Even more: "Hospitality is important to all the great world religions today."<sup>281</sup> Hence, there is a common denominator. Even though it is true, as mentioned, that often religions may not appear to be hospitable, it is also as true that all living faiths seek hospitality and dream of it.<sup>282</sup> Something else, however, needs to be added here: while hospitality is a common denominator - in terms of invitation for mutual engagement - it also represents complexity. "It is hard to underestimate the complexity of the task of religious conversation and dialogue, with its interaction of the global and local, the pluralist, the inclusive and the exclusivist strands, the fluctuations between essentialist and changing elements."<sup>283</sup> Only a careful attention to details of investigation, respectful honoring of the Otherness of other traditions and their representatives, as well as bold but humble arguing for one's deepest convictions, in the hopes of being both enriched and being able to share a convincing testimony, makes such a multifaceted enterprise feasible.

Again in this chapter, the order and selection of interfaith encounters vary. The most extreme monotheism of Islam will be engaged first; thereafter, in many ways going to the other extreme, the apparently polytheistic Hinduism will be invited for dialogue, to be followed by Buddhist traditions. There will be no separate focused investigation of Christian-Jewish dialogue because the most burning issue related to Trinity, namely Christology, is discussed in some detail in the volume *Christ and Reconciliation* and the somewhat parallel problems related to the unity of God are investigated in relation to Islam. Furthermore, throughout the investigation, where relevant, Judaism, as the closest monotheistic religion, sharing part of the same Scripture, will be engaged in relation to other faiths.

## **Allah and the Father of Jesus Christ**

### **Islamic "Classical Theism"**

While deeply similar to older monotheistic "cousin" faiths, Judaism and Christianity,<sup>284</sup> it can be said that "[n]o religious community puts more emphasis on the absolute oneness of God than does Islam."<sup>285</sup> Affirmed

everywhere in Islamic theology, the short sura 112 of the Qur'an puts its succinctly, taking notice also of the fallacy of the Christian confession of the Trinity:

Say: "He is God, One.  
God, the Self-Sufficient, Besought of all.  
He neither begot, nor was begotten.  
Nor is there anyone equal to Him."

Hence, the basic Muslim confession of *shahada*: "There is no god but God, and Muhammed is the apostle of God." So robust is the belief in the unity of God that for some Muslim philosophers and mystics the principle of unity also applies to reality itself.

An essential aspect of the divine unity is Allah's distinction from all else. The common statement "God is great" (*Allah akbar*) means not only that but also that "God is greater" than anything else. Hence, the biggest sin is *shirk*, associating anything with Allah.<sup>286</sup> Importantly, *shirk* means literally "ingratitude," in other words, "that there is only one divine Creator who should be thanked and praised; no other being is to be given the thanks due only to God."<sup>287</sup> In that light it is understandable that, unlike modern forms of Christianity, the Muslim faith encompasses all of life. "Faith does not concern a sector of life - no, the whole of life is *islam*"<sup>288</sup> (submission). Hence, the five pillars of Islam (profession of faith, prayers, alms-giving, fasting, and pilgrimage) shape all of life.

Muslim theology of God includes the built-in dynamic between the absolute transcendence of God, because of his incomparability and uniqueness, on the one hand, and on the other hand, his presence and rulership in the world, which is a call for total obedience.<sup>289</sup> Unlike Christian theology in general and Classical Panentheism in particular, Muslims "tend to speak of God's presence in terms of 'presence with' rather than 'presence in'."<sup>290</sup> The most celebrated Muslim theologian Al-Ghazali's small, but very important study *The Niche for Lights* - an extended comment on one verse of the Qur'an (24:35), which speaks of the "likeness of His [Allah's] Light . . . as a niche wherein is a lamp" - at first reading sounds like as an affirmation of monism because it says that everything "other than Allâh is, when considered in and by itself, pure not-being. . . . Therefore, the God-aspect is the sole thing in existence" (1.6). That, however, is not monism but rather the linking of everything to God, making the created reality depend on Allah, similarly to Qur'an 40:68: "He it is Who gives life and brings death. So when He decides upon a matter, He only says to it 'Be!' and it is."<sup>291</sup> And yet, there is a monistic tendency of a sort - which is understandable in light of Al-Ghazali's Sufi background: "Therefore '*There is no deity but ALLAH*' is the Many's declaration of Unity" (1.7). The same kind of dynamic is not unknown in either Jewish or Christian theology as well, although it can be said that classical theism is an important way to negotiate it.

In his transcendence and incomparability, says Al-Ghazali, Allah is "infinitely" greater: "The meaning is rather that he is too absolutely Great to be called Greater, or Most Great, by way of relation or comparison - too Great for anyone, whether Prophet or Angel, to grasp the real nature of His Greatness" (1.6), so much so that he "transcends all relations" because "to

bear relationship to what is imperfect carries with it imperfection” (2.2). These kinds of statements are meant to secure the total transcendence of God. They of course raise the question of whether “Ghazzali goes so far in stressing God’s utter difference from all finite things that it becomes increasingly difficult to say how Allah is related to the world as Creator and Judge at all.”<sup>292</sup> Gleaning from Sufi mysticism, but staying still within the orthodox mainstream (Sunni) tradition, Al-Ghazali builds a case for different levels of trying to reach this utterly transcendent divine reality, ladders of ascent,<sup>293</sup> as it were, culminating in those who go beyond mere obedience to the Creator or conceptual understanding to some kind of mystical union and perfection, as described in the ending paragraphs (3.4) of *The Niche for Lights*. Rightly Keith Ward observes that, similarly to the Jewish Maimonides, regarding Al-Ghazali we “find that when he presses the quest for understanding the nature of God, he comes to a place where concepts fail of application, but where it seems to make sense to speak of a possible object of experience, knowledge, and bliss.”

One of the most well known ways in Islamic theology to imagine God is the listing of the 99 Beautiful Names of God.<sup>294</sup> Interestingly, there is no unanimity concerning whether “Allah” belongs to that number or is the hundredth one. Be that as it may, that foundational name is attached to a number of other designations, thus, for example, *al-Malik* (the King), *al-Salam* (the Peace), and *al-Muhaymin* (the Vigilant).<sup>295</sup> The naming of the divine is more important for Islamic theology than for Christian.<sup>296</sup> Illustrative here is the beginning of each of the Qur’anic suras (save one) with the description of God as the “Compassionate, the Merciful.”<sup>297</sup> As in the Bible, there are occasionally anthropomorphic metaphors of Allah such as the “face of God” (Q 2:115; 92:20) or the “hand(s) of God” (48:10; 5:64), although in general Islam is of course much more cautious about not picturing Allah.

When it comes to major themes in the Qur’an’s teaching about Allah, along with transcendence and mercy, the following seem to be dominant: first, God as creator and origin of everything; second, the divine unity, mentioned above; and, third, the dual emphasis on Allah’s omnipotence and benevolence.<sup>298</sup> Furthermore, the theme of Allah’s justice and judgment looms large in the Qur’an, and of course - similarly to Christian and Jewish tradition - must be linked with mercy.<sup>299</sup> Echoing the Christian teaching, Al-Ghazali reminds us that “My mercy is greater than My wrath,” but that is not a pretext for complacency, as if, “Well, whatever we do, God is merciful.”<sup>300</sup> Also important, Islam affirms the idea of the freedom of will among humans differently from some Christian traditions. “God would be neither just nor good if He punished people for acts for which they were not responsible,” consequently, human beings must have been created human beings with the ability to choose between wrong and right.<sup>301</sup> That, however, is not to deny some kind of view of divine predestination, based on Allah’s omniscience and omnipotence; that affirmation does not negate human responsibility and, unlike Christian tradition, has no original sin doctrine behind it. The all-determining power of Allah comes to the fore in the theology of al-Ashari:

It is always towards God that his thoughts move. God is all in all; everything is in His hand; and since He is the Merciful and the Compassionate, the proper attitude toward Him is patience . . . in the face of His judgments and loyal obedience to His commands. It is clear that al-Ashari is a determinist, but it is just as clear that his determinism is throughout pervaded with the thought of God.<sup>302</sup>

Similarly to Christian tradition, Islam moved towards “classical theism” early on. To take an obvious example: the adjectives *compassionate* and *merciful* were transformed in later theology into the more fixed and analytic nouns *compassion* and *mercy* as attributes of Allah. Importantly, this development began not only in early Islamic theology but has its precedent in the Qur’an itself.<sup>303</sup> This is what was argued above about the “seeds” of classical theism in the NT. The rise of *kalam* theology was the culmination of this development, as evident in the masterful work of the tenth-century (c.e.) al-Ashari. Not unlike in Christian tradition, there was a continuing debate between the traditionalists who wished to retain the verbatim biblical account and the Mu’tazilites, the rationalists, who were drawn to systematic explanations, which in many ways paralleled Christian scholasticism.<sup>304</sup> “A Short Creed by Al-Ashari” reads like a Christian confession, yet also obviously rebuts its trinitarian claims: “We believe . . . [t]hat God is One God, Single, One, Eternal; beside Him no God exists; He has taken to Himself no wife (*sahiba*), nor child (*walad*).”<sup>305</sup> The creed lists basic beliefs in God as creator, powerful, providing, and as eschatological consummator.

Similarly to Christian scholastics, the Asharites, followers of al-Ashari *kalam* theology, engaged in highly sophisticated disputes about, for example, how to understand the attributes of God in relation to God’s essence and so also entered debates with the Mu’taziles. Whereas the Mu’tazilites were not willing to attach the attributes to the essence of God, but rather to his actions, the Asharites - as well as Al-Ghazali, as discussed below - linked some attributes to the essence and others to his actions.<sup>306</sup> A noted debate had to do with the proper conception of the most important attribute of Allah, namely, the speech of God, that God had spoken and revealed himself. The Asharites considered the speaking contingent since it obviously had happened in time, whereas for Ibn Hanbal, God’s speech, the Qur’an, is part of God’s eternal being. That debate in turn has to do with the dispute over whether the Qur’an is created or uncreated.<sup>307</sup> Furthermore, Muslim theologians of old delved deeply into the debate of God-language, for example, in terms of how to best understand the anthropomorphisms present in the Qur’an.<sup>308</sup>

While there is hardly a classified typology of attributes in Islamic traditions - although many contemporary Islamic theologians familiar with Christian tradition find the classification into “communicable” and “incommunicable”<sup>309</sup> attributes meaningful - traditionally thirteen attributes mentioned in sura 59:22-24 feature first in the list. The most well known listing of attributes, as presented by Al-Ghazali, includes knowing, powerful, living, willing, hearing, seeing, and speaking,<sup>310</sup> followed by four “properties”: existence, eternity, unity, and knowability. Unlike the attributes, which “are not [God’s] essence” - these four properties are part of

God's essence, whereas the seven attributes are "superadded to the essence."<sup>311</sup> Similarly to some aspects of Christian theology of God that take a paradoxical approach, the listing of attributes may follow the logic of polarities: "doublets having both a correlative and a paradoxical sense," such as "Restrainer" and "Expander" or "Creator of Life" and "Creator of Death."<sup>312</sup> Luther's theology of the cross comes to mind here.

While Muslim theology is not in general favorable toward personal characteristics of Allah, in order to highlight the absolute distinction between the Creator and creature, they are also not totally missing from the tradition. Al-Ghazali may at times say that "God is more tender to his servants than a mother to her suckling-child," referring this statement to the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>313</sup> Similarly, there are a few instances of linking human knowledge of self to the knowledge of God, an idea well established in Christian tradition (Augustine), although - for reasons mentioned previously - that is also a theme handled with great care in Islam. Al-Ghazali's opening statement in *The Alchemy of Happiness* states boldly: "Knowledge of self is the key to the knowledge of God, according to the saying: 'He who knows himself knows God' and, as it is written in the Koran, 'We will show them Our signs in the world and *in themselves*, that the truth may be manifest to them.'"<sup>314</sup>

Early Muslim theology's relation to pagan philosophy was not much different from that of Christian tradition. There was a great appreciation and liberal borrowing from the greatest masters of antiquity, including Plato and Aristotle, and at times, reminders of the inadequacy of philosophy alone, apart from Qur'anic authority, to establish divine truths.<sup>315</sup> As early as the ninth-century (c.e.) work of the famous philosopher-theologian Al-Farabi, we see significant Platonic and Aristotelian influences. Consider his listing of the attributes of God under the rubric "Metaphysical Theology"; they could easily come from a typical Christian manual: simplicity, infinity, immutability, unity, intelligence, "God Knows All Things through Knowledge of Himself"; "God is Truth"; "God is Life."<sup>316</sup> As mentioned above, Muslim theologians also engaged the "proofs" for the existence of God borrowing from Aristotle.

Similarly to Christian and some other living faith traditions, including Hindu *bhakti* traditions, the mystically oriented Sufi traditions were less drawn to philosophical and conceptual clarifications of the attributes and instead majored on a prayerful apophatic attitude and spiritual vision. Importantly - and differently from much of Christian asceticism, which tended to be somewhat isolationist, but similarly to much of Buddhist monastic life - these early Muslim ascetics sought to live out their faith in the midst of the common people and thus helped disseminate Sufi spirituality at the grassroots level. If obedience - unreserved submission - to Allah is the hallmark of much of mainline Islam, then love of God, similarly to, say, Hindu *bhakti* traditions, is the defining issue of Sufism.<sup>317</sup> At times deemed heretical, Sufism also was deeply integrated into the fabric of Muslim faith and in many cases its followers played significant roles in the missionary work. A shining example is the greatest Islamic theologian, al-Ghazali<sup>318</sup> of the eleventh century, who was both Sufi and a great

intellectual, even philosophical, mind. In him the best of early Muslim spiritual, mystical, philosophical, scientific, and theological influences coalesced.

### **The Unity of God and Christian Confession of Trinity**

The Qur'an absolutely and unequivocally affirms the oneness of God. According to Al-Ghazali, on the one hand, that "God is one . . . means the negation of anything other than He and the affirmation of His essence." On the other hand, oneness means the denial of plurality in God: "He does not accept divisibility, i.e., He has no quantity, neither definition nor magnitude. It also means that He has no equal in rank and absolutely no equal in any manner." Similarly to Christian tradition, the unity also includes the unity of God's existence and essence.<sup>319</sup> The leading contemporary Muslim theologian, active also in the "Common Word" project, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, notes that the traditional Christian creedal confession *credo in unum Deum* materially repeats the affirmation of the Muslim confession *lā iāha illa' Llāhā*.<sup>320</sup>

The Qur'anic teaching categorically rejects any notion of threeness of God as set forth in the classic passage, 4:171, according to which Jesus is "merely God's messenger and His Word . . . and a spirit from Him";<sup>321</sup> indeed, the trinitarian confession is nothing less than blasphemy (5:76). A foundational reason for the strict rebuttal of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity includes the absolute exaltedness of Allah and the sheer absurdity of the idea of God having a child by a woman.<sup>322</sup> (What is remarkable about this rebuttal of the Trinity is that ironically it gives Jesus a high status, as he is called the "word" and "spirit," whatever the precise theological meanings in Islam were!)

Muslims reject the Christian concept of "God in Christ" on the ground of God's glory and greatness (*tabbīr*). For them, it is unworthy for a sovereign God to be human. In his essay, "'Greater is God,' Contemporary *Tabbīr*: Muslim and Christian,"<sup>323</sup> Kenneth Cragg seeks to find a connecting point between the Islamic notion of *tabbīr* and the Christian Magnificat. His argument is that the concept of *tabbīr* is a shared reality between the two religions. He insists that as the concept of *tabbīr* (*Allāh Akbar*) is crucial in Islam, the Christian Magnificat (magnify the Lord) is essential to Christians and runs through the whole Bible. Again, as the term *islām* (submission) conveys that the core of Islam is to make God to be all in all, in Christianity God's being "all in all" is what NT Christology is all about. But "the crucial question has to do with the nature of the 'greatness' we affirm."<sup>324</sup> In that light, from a Christian perspective it can be suggested that the incarnation or the *kenosis* of God does not necessarily oppose God's greatness. On the contrary, Cragg argues, it is in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, that what Muslims desire to assert regarding God's greatness is effected: it is in Jesus Christ, "God in Christ," that God achieved his intention toward humanity. "For is that sovereignty truly sovereign if it fails to take action against the empire of ignorance and evil in humankind?"<sup>325</sup> Again, this is a statement by and from a Christian theology and should be presented as an invitation for mutual dialogue.

Another major reason for the categorical rejection of Trinity in Islamic theology is that it represents *shirk*. On this issue, we need to clarify “what Christology is *not*, what *Shirk* is, and what is *not Shirk*.” When the Qur’an gives “Praise to God who took not up a son” (17:111, 19:35, 19:92; 25:2), it has to be noted that statement is also affirmed by Christians as it is not a statement about incarnation but rather of adoptionism. Cragg suggests that instead of speaking of incarnation in terms of “taking up,” we should rather think of *tanāzul* (descending). “Deification in *ittikhādh* [“taking up”] is all human and chronically misguided. In *tanāzul* the initiative is all God’s and blessedly compassionate,” he notes. A way to help Muslims grasp this idea is to establish the connection between Christ’s preexistence and that of the Qur’an.<sup>326</sup>

Often behind the Muslim charge of *shirk* may also be an Arian heretical notion according to which Christ is “associated” as closely as possible with God, but is not God.<sup>327</sup> But that view was categorically rejected by Christian creeds. Now, what is *shirk*? It is “plural worship,” but it is not “the manifold ‘association’ that exists between Creator and creature, between Lord and servant.”<sup>328</sup> In other words, God’s gracious relation or association with humanity, the eternal Word becoming human, is not *shirk*. Muslim tradition also, of course, speaks freely and robustly of God’s “association” with nondivine realities, in creation, providence, prophecy, and law. In all Semitic faiths, we find that “God can be known by man only in conjunction with the human situation.”<sup>329</sup> “In each faith, there is ‘God and. . .’ In Judaism, the central ‘association’ is peoplehood and covenant - ‘God and His People.’ In Islam, the central ‘association’ is prophethood - ‘God and his Prophet.’ In Christianity, the central ‘association’ is Christ - ‘God in Christ.’”<sup>330</sup>

In response to the charge of *shirk*, recall the statement by Pannenberg that “beyond the unity no more can be said about God. . . . Thus, the doctrine of the Trinity is in fact concrete monotheism in contrast to the notions of an abstract transcendence of the one God and abstract notions of a divine unity that leaves no place for plurality.”<sup>331</sup> Rather than three gods, in Christian theology “[t]he trinitarian persons . . . are simply manifestations and forms - eternal forms - of the one divine essence.”<sup>332</sup> That was affirmed not only by some of the earliest Christian theological writings on the Trinity, such as Gregory of Nyssa’s *On “Not Three Gods”* in the Christian East or Augustine in the West, but even in the most authoritative creeds. Just consider the Athanasian creed, one of the earliest ones: “That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co eternal.”<sup>333</sup> Rightly, the medieval Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa reminded us that the oneness of God is prior to the plurality,<sup>334</sup> and hence, “When you begin to count the Trinity you depart from the truth”<sup>335</sup> because the three “persons” make one God!<sup>336</sup> (In that light, Nicholas’s material affirmation of the classic notion of the “simplicity of God” should not be hastily dismissed by contemporary theologians who see it as a way of

undermining the trinitarian communion!) Similarly to Muslim theology, Nicholas ultimately appealed to revelation: when the Bible tells us that God is love, it means that there must be an internal distinction in the one godhead to allow for the “lover” to show love to “another”<sup>337</sup> - an argument presented by other Christian theologians as well (Richard of St. Victor). Furthermore, by the same logic, God’s self-revelation - a premise affirmed by both traditions - for the cardinal required that there be the “internal” Word in God who alone, as incarnate, can reveal God to us.<sup>338</sup> Only God - an “insider,” if we may say so - can unveil to humans God.

What about incarnation? Isn’t that necessarily a statement about plurality in the Christian understanding of God: one God “up there in heaven” and the other one “down here on earth”? Christian tradition negotiates that dilemma with two ancient concepts, namely, the “Augustinian” rule according to which the works of the Trinity *ad extra* (in relation to creation) are undivided,<sup>339</sup> and *perichoresis*, the principle of mutual indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>340</sup> Consider the prologue to John’s Gospel, which speaks of the Word (*Logos*) that became flesh (1:14) as not only being *with* God but *being* God (1:1). Similarly, consider the Johannine Jesus’ saying that “The Father is in me and I am in the Father” (10:38).<sup>341</sup> Hence, Christianity affirms that “[i]n worshipping Jesus one does not worship another than God; one simply worships God,” as difficult as that statement is in light of its Christological ramifications, namely, that Jesus, the human person, is considered to be divine.<sup>342</sup> Nor is Christian theology or the Bible ever affirming what the Qur’an claims to be a Christian statement: “Behold, God is the Christ, son of Mary” (Q 5:72).<sup>343</sup> Christian faith, rather says that Christ is God.

What if Muslim and Christian theologians took these affirmations of the unity of God from the Christian side as guidelines when working towards a common understanding without artificially ignoring the differences? Could then the promise by the Muslim thinker Seyyed Hossein Nasr be redeemed at least to some extent: “Every question regarding the Trinity can be resolved between Christianity and Islam by a truly metaphysical penetration into the meaning of the fundamental polarization of the One.”<sup>344</sup> All in all, in engaging another radically monotheist faith, whether Jewish or Islamic, Christian faith can also help clarify its own core beliefs and teach its members about the correct way of negotiating unity-in-diversity/diversity-in-unity.<sup>345</sup>

### **Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?**

The Muslim theologian Seyyed Hossein Nasr puts the question of the relationship between Allah and the God of the Bible in perspective:

There are already those on the Christian side who assert that the Christian God is not the same as Allah, who is an Arabic lunar deity or something like that. Such people who usually combine sheer ignorance with bigotry should attend a Sunday mass in Arabic in Bethlehem, Beirut, Amman, or Cairo and hear what Arabic term the Christians of these cities use for the Christian God. Nor is God simply to be identified with one member of the Christian Trinity, one part of three divinities that some Muslims believe wrongly that

Christians worship. Allah, or God, is none other than the One God of Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.<sup>346</sup>

Now, what is at stake in this debate? Briefly put, both peace and theological integrity. “A deep chasm of misunderstanding, dislike, and even hatred separates many Christians and Muslims today. Christian responses to Allah . . . will either widen that chasm or help bridge it. If for Christians Allah is a foreign and false god, all bridge building will suffer,” notes Miroslav Volf, who reminds us that “[t]he stakes are high. Muslims and Christians together comprise more than half of humanity.”<sup>347</sup> While this practical reason alone would substantiate rigorous and widespread common work on this topic, there is also a deep and foundational theological issue at stake. The question at hand has to do with even more than just interfaith hospitality; in the words of the Jewish theologian John D. Levenson, “no monotheist can ever accuse anyone - certainly not another monotheist - of worshipping *another* God, only (at most) of improperly identifying the one God that both seek to serve.”<sup>348</sup>

Currently, it is a commonplace scholarly consensus that the term *allah* predates the time of Muhammad. It is also a consensus that - against the older scholarly view and still a regular popular opinion - the name did not originate in the context of moon worship in Arabia (even though the crescent became Islam’s symbol and moon worship was known in that area).<sup>349</sup> The term derives from Aramaic and Syriac words for God (*elah*, *alah*).<sup>350</sup> In that light it is fully understandable that even among Christians in Arabic-speaking areas the term Allah is the designation for God.<sup>351</sup> However, to say that both etymologically and theologically both Muslims and Christians refer to the same God when they speak of the Divine is not yet to settle the issue of *what kind* of God that is. In other words, “The real difficulty lies not in identifying the ultimate referent of the word ‘God,’ but knowing how to respond to the dizzying array of predicates *about* God that sometimes seem contradictory.” That is important to note since “[n]o Muslim or Christian . . . worships a *generic* God or the mere *concept* of God in some vague, philosophical mist.”<sup>352</sup> Both Islam and Christianity claim to be based on divine revelation and seek to ground their understanding of the God whom believers worship, and to whom they devote their lives, on Scripture. While those Scriptures and the subsequent theological reflection and tradition share a lot in common, significant differences also complicate our clarifying the extent and meaning of the foundational consensus on the same referent of the term itself.<sup>353</sup>

This issue is not new to either tradition. As early as in the seventh Christian century, John of Damascus, the most celebrated theologian in the Christian East with firsthand knowledge of the Muslim faith<sup>354</sup> delved deeply into it in the last chapter of his *De Haeresibus (On Heresies)* - an encyclopedic investigation of all sorts of heresies, past and current, altogether no less than 101 in number! The Damascene’s assessment of Muslims is harsh and terse, considering them “idol worshippers.”<sup>355</sup> On the constructive side, John makes the important point, citing the *tawhid* confession, “He [Muhammad] says that there is one God, creator of all, who is neither begotten, nor has begotten,” in other words, robustly supporting

the shared doctrine of the unity of God, which he also exposts in more detail in *De Fide Orthodoxa* (1.5), importantly under the heading of “On the Holy Trinity”! Subsequently, in the rest of the tract he responds to typical Muslim charges, including the *shirk*, and also engages in counterattack in terms of Muhammad’s family and other similar Christian criticisms.

Subsequently debates continued, reaching no consensus.<sup>356</sup> A highly important paradigm of the Christian approach to Allah comes from Nicholas of Cusa, who testified to the horrendous disaster in the capital of the Eastern Christian Church, Constantinople, as the forces of the Ottoman Empire under the leadership of Mehmed II in 1453 violently and brutally conquered the city. Following the end of May ransacking of the holy city, in September of the same year the Catholic cardinal penned the highly influential *De Pace Fidei (On the Harmonious Peace of Religions)* which, instead of supporting Pope Nicholas V’s call to another crusade against the infidels, sought to summon a conference “in Jerusalem,” under the auspices of the Heavenly King of Kings between rival religions to achieve a “harmony among religions” and “perpetual peace.”<sup>357</sup> Even with the horror of the devastated city in his mind - which may remind us of the events of 9/11 in New York City - Nicholas asserted that all people, including the Muslims, worship one and the same God “in everything they are seen to adore” and that if they fail to do so, it is because of ignorance.<sup>358</sup> That is because, as his most famous dictum puts it, *una religio in varietate rituum*, “one religion in a variety of rites.”<sup>359</sup> Not that Cusa was anything like current pluralists to whom all deities are but human interpretations of the same Ultimate Reality (Hick). The cardinal believed firmly that the biblical view of God is the truest and correct one and that other religions, including Islam are beset with errors.<sup>360</sup> In his subsequent treatise *Cribratio Alkorani (Shifting of the Qur’an)*, Nicholas was not soft on the perceived mistakes among Muslims concerning the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Christology, and he also issued a call for the Muslim leader to have God “open your eyes . . . and grant this [enlightenment] to you.”<sup>361</sup> All in all - particularly in light of the catastrophic events and the prejudices of his times - “[f]rom a Christian perspective . . . his strategy can be seen as an exercise in charitable interpretation,”<sup>362</sup> in Cusa’s words, he, “presupposed not a faith that is other but a faith that is one and the same.”<sup>363</sup>

While the Protestant Reformers were certainly not known for interfaith hospitality,<sup>364</sup> surprisingly Luther clearly assumed the common deity of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam even when seriously undermining and critiquing the deficiency of their faith: “All who are outside this Christian people, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites - even though they believe in and worship only the one, true God - nevertheless they do not know what his attitude is toward them.”<sup>365</sup> In other words, Luther deplores the lack of knowledge of the divine grace and love among the non-Christians even though they wish to cling to the right God.<sup>366</sup> While not often highlighted, it is a well-known scholarly fact that the identification of the Christian and Muslim God - even in the midst of highly polemic debates and mutual criticisms - was by and large the traditional Christian opinion;<sup>367</sup> in that sense, Luther follows tradition.

A number of important tasks are involved in the consideration of the issue whether Islam and Christianity worship the same God. First, the investigation must begin with an acknowledgment and careful look at the implications for Christian tradition of the fact that Islam speaks of God in universal terms, as “the God of all people,” and therefore, the Qur’anic message “is a message for all people: all people should become Muslims, for God is the sovereign God of all people.”<sup>368</sup> Related to that is Islam’s nature as a “public faith”<sup>369</sup> - but such is also the Christian faith.<sup>370</sup> Differences come to the fore with regard to the fact that Christian theology links God with all peoples, and the rest of creation, in the context and from the perspective of the election of a particular people (first in the OT and then in the NT). For Islam, the idea of the selection of a particular people by God is totally unknown, similarly, the idea of the covenant.<sup>371</sup> What Islam does is universalize not only Judaism but also Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>372</sup> Part of the universalizing tendency is the important promise in sura 42:15: “God is our Lord and your Lord. Our deeds concern us and your deeds concern you. There is no argument between us and you. God will bring us together, and to Him is the [final] destination.” It is noteworthy that this same sura also mentions that “had God willed, He would have made them one community; but He admits whomever He will into His mercy” (v. 8) and that “whatever you may differ in, the verdict therein belongs to God” (v. 10). The important reason, hence, why Muslim theology can unequivocally affirm the identity of the God of Islam and God of Christianity has to do with the principle of continuity - in terms of fulfillment - between the divine revelations given first to the Jews, then to Christians, and finally, in the completed form, to Islam (2:136; 6:83-89; 29:46).<sup>373</sup> While Christian tradition understands the principle of universality differently, based on its own Scriptures and doctrine of God, materially it shares the same viewpoint: the God of the Bible, Yahweh, the Father of Jesus Christ, is the God of all nations and the whole of creation, “the all-determining reality” (Pannenberg). Therefore, both faiths also are deeply missionary by nature.

Second, an important asset to Christian theology for reflecting on the relation of Allah to the God of the Bible is its relation to Judaism. There are hardly Christians who would deny that Yahweh and the Father of Jesus Christ are one and the same God. Yet the Jews no less adamantly oppose the trinitarian confession of faith.<sup>374</sup> This simply means that Christian tradition is able to confess belief in and worship One God even when significant differences exist in the understanding of the nature of that God - and, indeed, more than that: even when the differences are deeply divisive and seemingly contradictory. Importantly, the Jewish theologian John Levenson concludes: “In the last analysis, the Christian and the Muslim conceptions of the one God have enough in common to make a productive comparison possible, but as in any responsible comparison, the contrasts must not be sugared over.”<sup>375</sup> To confess one God does not mean requiring an identical understanding of the nature of that God if there are significant, wide-reaching agreements, as there are between Christians and Muslims, including the oneness of God, God as Creator, God’s love, and so forth.<sup>376</sup> Just consider how widely the views of various Christian traditions may

differ from each other. Add to the equation the third monotheistic faith, Judaism, and the differences are real - even when these three Abrahamic faiths, having their roots deeply embedded in the Jewish Bible claim the same One God.<sup>377</sup>

In relation to Jewish theologians, contemporary Christian theology reminds them of the possibility of conceiving distinctions in the one God in terms of semi-personified agents such as Word, Spirit, and Wisdom, and concepts such as glory and the name of Yahweh. Would anything like that apply to Islam? What about the eternity of the Word as Qur'an? What about the sentness of the Prophet(s)?<sup>378</sup> Recently it has also been suggested that “‘Word of God’ and ‘Spirit of God’ in Christian and Islamic Christologies” could serve as “A Starting Point for Interreligious Dialogue.”<sup>379</sup>

The third task has to do with the clarification of many misunderstandings on the Islamic side concerning what they (mistakenly) believe the Christian trinitarian confessions means. What if it is the case that “[w]hat the Qur'an denies about God as the Holy Trinity has been denied by every great teacher of the church in the past and ought to be denied by every orthodox Christian today”?<sup>380</sup> We have already noted most of the typical misconceptions among the Muslims, including the inclusion of Mary along with Father and Son, adoptionistic and Arianist interpretations, and the blunt charge of tritheism. Only patient and painstaking mutual dialogue may help correct and clarify these kinds of issues. Again, history provides us useful examples. Just consider Paul of Antioch's (11th-12th century c.e.) *Letter to a Muslim*, in which he sought to correct typical misconceptions and offer a constructive proposal that both defended the unity of God and tried to explain the Trinity in light of Muslim sensibilities. “By refusing to employ the Christian term *uqnum* (hypostasis), and preferring to it the native Arabic and theologically neutral term *ism* (name), he is apparently attempting to disassociate his explanation from the polemical tradition which preceded him and to present the doctrine in a manner acceptable to Muslims.” Furthermore, he argues that “[a]ll the names and attributes of God stem from the three substantial attributes . . . of existence, speech, and life,” and speech is related to incarnation and sonship.<sup>381</sup> Apart from how convincing or successful the Catholic theologian's construction may be, its tactics are admirable, namely, correction and “contextualization.” At least the short tract of twenty-four pages was important enough to inspire what became the most significant Muslim attack ever on Christian tradition and theology, that is, Ibn Taymiyyah's massive *Al-Jawab Al-Sahih* (“The Correct Answer to Those Who Changed the Religions of Christ”), written around 1320 c.e. While this apologetic work goes far beyond that of Paul's, it was occasioned by that short writing.

Fourth, we must clarify what and how much can be said about the identity of the two monotheistic tradition's God. It is significant that while the highly influential interfaith statement “A Common Word Between Us and You” did not explicitly state that Christians and Muslims believe in the same God, it quoted from the Qur'an, which unequivocally affirms the identity: “We believe what was revealed to us and what was revealed to you. Our God and your God is one, and to him we submit as Muslims”

(Al' Ankabut 29:46). And again: "God is our Lord and your Lord; we have our works and you have your works; there is no argument between us and you; God brings us together; and to him is the final destiny" (Al Shura, 42:15). Both Christian and Muslim signatories commonly endorsed that affirmation. Not surprisingly, some Christian theologians and leaders vehemently opposed that affirmation.<sup>382</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church's hospitable and theologically astute statement on Islam is a useful starting point for specifically Christian reflections:

The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion.<sup>383</sup>

While this statement from *Nostra Aetate* fails to give a blank affirmation of the identity of Allah and the Christian God,<sup>384</sup> it seems to be assuming it and, at minimum, affirms wholeheartedly its strict monotheistic orientation in line with Abrahamic faiths. At the same time, the statement is not silent about Islam's opposition to trinitarian confession in terms of Jesus' divinity.<sup>385</sup>

As said, generally speaking, Muslim theology and theologians affirm the identity of the Qur'an's and the Bible's God.<sup>386</sup> Consider only the Qur'anic passage 29:46. That said, however, the same divine revelation to Muslims, the Qur'an, also categorically condemns Christians for seriously compromising the dearest part of the doctrine of God, God's oneness!<sup>387</sup> This means that on the Muslim side, much work has to be done in reconciling these two seemingly contradictory claims. On the Christian side, as even the Vatican II statement illustrates, a continuing careful nuancing of the issue - apart from some conservative outright rebuttals - continues. Illustrative is the series of essays "Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?" in *Christian Century* in 2004, to which not only Muslim and Christian but also Jewish theologians contributed. While none of the writers denied the same reference point among the traditions' understanding of God, only the Muslim writer gave an unreserved positive answer. The Jewish theologian affirmed the common basis if differences in understanding of God are not ignored, and the three Christians representing different theological traditions (Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, and evangelical) all, albeit somewhat differently, expressed some continuing ambiguity with regard to identification of the faith's God with regard to character of the Divine.<sup>388</sup> A growing number of Christian theologians are coming to the conviction that to deny the identity of Allah and the God of the Bible creates more problems than its affirmation.<sup>389</sup> Miroslav Volf's recent *Allah: A Christian Response* argues for the identity while delving deeply into historical and continuing deep theological divergences with regard to the nature of God.<sup>390</sup>

Having affirmed that Muslims and Christians believe in the same God, the Dutch Christian philosopher of religion Hendrik Vroom “would like to add that Christians, on the basis of the gospel, are better *able* to know God than Muslims are.”<sup>391</sup> This is not an expression of a puffed-up spirit of superiority but rather a confident call to Muslims from a Christian perspective to consider rich values in the Christian trinitarian conception of faith in one God. The same was affirmed by the French Roman Catholic Church in extended exchange with local Muslims. Rather than pushing Trinity to the margins, it was stated that “[t]he Church is committed to dialogue above all because of her faith in the trinitarian mystery of the one God . . . [which] makes us catch sight of a life of fellowship and exchanges in God himself, source of all mission and all dialogue.” Dialogue corresponds to the being of the Triune God and hence the confession of faith in one God as Father, Son, and Spirit; eternal loving communion is an invitation to dialogue and engagement.<sup>392</sup> The Finnish theologian Risto Jukko, expert in Muslim-Christian relations, summarizes the trinitarian foundation of the dialogue as it came to expression in the French situation: “It seems that only the concept of the trinitarian God can be the basis for fruitful interreligious Christian dialogue with non-Christians . . . [especially] Muslims. Even though the concept is an article of Christian theology . . . it unites transcendence and immanence, creation and redemption in such a way that from the Christian standpoint dialogue becomes possible and meaningful. It is the hermeneutical key to interpret the religious experiences of non-Christians (as well as of Christians).”<sup>393</sup>

This much can be said even though - as paradoxical as it may sound - the Trinity can hardly serve as the beginning point of the dialogue since the Islamic faith denies it at the outset.<sup>394</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, an authentic interfaith engagement is always a give-and-take event in which the Triune God is present. Not only can Christians contribute and challenge the Muslim faith, but so also are they challenged and enriched by the Other. This is hardly anything new and novel in Christian tradition. Just consider Aquinas’s *Summa Contra Gentiles*, which not only argues for the truth of Christian faith against other faiths but also liberally utilizes Muslim (and pagan philosophers’) resources in explicating the biblical faith.

## Notes

- 1 Ward, Religion and Revelation, p. 7.
- 2 Ward, Religion and Revelation, p. 7.
- 3 Even in contemporary science there is today the healthy admission that very few, if any, scientific results can be had with indubitable certainty (the dream and assumption of the Enlightenment). Far less so in the humanities in which the investigation proceeds in terms of argumentation, comparison of ideas, and similar non-observational means.
- 4 Eck, A New Religious America, pp. 5-6 (5), 61-65; see also Hutchinson, Religious Pluralism in America.
- 5 Pew Forum, "US Religious Landscape Survey, February 2008," pp. 5-7 (5, 7).
- 6 Hall, Thinking the Faith, pp. 208-9 (209).
- 7 Marty, When Faiths Collide, pp. 30, 159-61.
- 8 Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 266.
- 9 Brunner, Revelation and Reason, p. 271.
- 10 Tennett, Theology in the Context of World Christianity, p. 55; see also Amaladoss, "Other Scriptures and the Christian," pp. 62-78.
- 11 Dulles, Models of Revelation, p. 14.
- 12 I borrow this heading from Abraham, "Revelation Reaffirmed," p. 206. See his important works: The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture and Divine Revelation and the Limits of Historical Criticism.
- 13 Ward, Religion and Revelation, p. 1.
- 14 A prime example of that approach is van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation (1933). In this massive work, only one short chapter (64) discusses Scriptures, and even that is mostly Western Scriptures.
- 15 For a highly useful and accessible introductory discussion, see Voorst, Anthology of World Scriptures, pp. 2-4, with ample bibliographic references for further study.
- 16 Coward, "Introduction," p. 1.
- 17 This delightful expression is in Voorst, Anthology of World Scriptures, p. 6.
- 18 Lipner, Hindus, p. 25.
- 19 See further, Levering, "Introduction" to Rethinking Scripture, pp. 3-5.
- 20 Voorst, Anthology of World Scriptures, p. 17.
- 21 See the seminal study by Ong, Orality and Literacy.
- 22 Pp. 1-4 particularly (a short introduction that states succinctly the basic thesis by comparing seeing and hearing).
- 23 Coward, "Introduction," p. 5.
- 24 For a highly useful discussion, see Coward, "Introduction," pp. 1-14.
- 25 The implications are discussed in the introductory methodological chapter to the volume Christ and Reconciliation.
- 26 Ward, Images of Eternity, p. 3.
- 27 Coward, "Introduction," p. 3.
- 28 Ward, Images of Eternity, p. 42; citation from Isa Upanishad 6 (also called Vāgasaneyi-Samhita Upanishad); SBE 1:312.
- 29 Ward, Images of Eternity, p. 42.
- 30 Ward, Images of Eternity, p. 42.
- 31 Ward, Images of Eternity, p. 43.
- 32 A supreme example of the need to turn to the poetic rather than discursive is Jodo Shinshu Buddhism in which ritual chanting is the main spiritual practice. Its founder, Shinran, found the rational study of Buddhism disappointing and came up with the chant of nembutsu, which touches first and foremost emotional, existential, and other deep areas in our lives.
- 33 For a careful comparison between Jewish and Islamic views of history, see Ward, Religion and Revelation, pp. 175-76.
- 34 Corrigan, Denny, Eire, and Jaffee, Jews, Christians, Muslims, p. 3.
- 35 For a detailed theological discussion, see Ward, Religion and Revelation, pp. 113-33. He summarizes (p. 128): "The Jewish claim is that Torah enshrines a deeper insight into the

demands of morality than unaided human speculation can provide, arising from the inspiration provided by God.”

36 Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, p. 153.

37 Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, p. 7.

38 Tanakh is an acronym formed from the first letters of the three sections of Scripture: Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim.

39 See the important remarks in Rosenbaum, “Judaism: Torah and Tradition,” pp. 12-17.

40 See Coward, *Sacred Word*, p. 13.

41 For a highly accessible discussion, see Segal, “Judaism,” pp. 15-33.

42 Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, pp. 111-12.

43 According to Lapidé (Israelis, Jews, and Jesus, p. 81), “In the period from the fourth to the sixteenth century no fewer than 106 popes and 92 Church councils issued anti-Jewish laws and regulations.”

44 Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, pp. xii-xiii.

45 Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, p. xii.

46 According to the Noahic covenant, provided that the Gentiles keep the seven laws described in the Oral Torah (which are claimed to be based on the teaching of Genesis even though there is no direct reference to it), they may be saved. The seven laws are described in Tosefta (tractate Avoda Zarah), chap. 9, para. 4.

47 Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, p. xiii; see also p. 13; on p. 32 Kogan makes the striking statement that the existence of “many billions [who] worship Israel’s God, only some 15 millions of them being Jews” means that “[t]his is either some gigantic accident or the partial fulfillment of God’s commission to Abraham.”

48 This paragraph is based on Heschel, “Jewish Views of Jesus,” pp. 149-51.

49 Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, p. 115. For a highly promising and constructive essay on Jewish views of incarnation, see E. R. Wolfson, “Judaism and Incarnation,” pp. 239-54.

50 See Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, p. 31.

51 Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, p. 55.

52 Most vocally Sachedina, *Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*.

53 Winkler, *Contemporary Muslim and Christian Responses*, p. 309.

54 Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, p. 174.

55 For basics, see Ford and Pecknold, *Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*. A highly useful, continuously updated database is the website of *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/>. Other noteworthy current works include Cheetham, Winkler, Leirvik, and Gruber, *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe*; Kepnes and Koshul, *Scripture, Reason, and the Contemporary Islam-West Encounter*.

56 For basic guidelines, see Kepnes, “Handbook for Scriptural Reasoning”; Ford, “Interfaith Wisdom.”

57 For a succinct comment on key Islamic distinctions between “inspiration” (ilham), “sending-down” (tanzil), and “prophetic rapture” (wahy), see Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, pp. 174-75.

58 Coward, *Sacred Word*, p. 81. Still an important succinct source to basic issues is Welch, “Al-Kur’ān.” A massive contemporary source is *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur’ān* (2006).

59 This is the official standpoint of the major tradition of Islam, the Sunni theology. The minority Shi’ite school teaches that the Qur’an was created in time (that statement, however, does not make the Qur’anic word less authoritative). See Momen, *Introduction to Shi’i Islam*, p. 176; I am indebted to Cornell, “Listening to God through the Qur’an,” n. 51.

60 Cragg notes that the term rasūl used in Islamic creedal traditions of Muhammad as the mediator of the Qur’an cannot be satisfactorily translated in English. The term conveys the meaning “doing/doing” in the root of “sentness.” Cragg, *House of Islam*, p. 19; I am indebted to Coward, *Sacred Word*, p. 82.

61 Cragg, *House of Islam*, p. 19; cited in Coward, *Sacred Word*, p. 82.

62 Coward, *Sacred Word*, p. 82.

63 See further, Cornell, “Listening to God through the Qur’an,” pp. 40-42.

64 Coward, *Sacred Word*, p. 82. An important Qur'anic explanation of the "sending-down" of the divine revelation on the "Night of Destiny" is in 53:5-11. For other passages on the divine origin and authority of Scripture, see 16:102; 26:192-5; 42:7. For its inimitability, see 2:23; 10:38. Whether Muhammad was illiterate or not is a debated question because of the ambiguity of interpretation of 7.158 ("uninstructed," in other renderings "unlettered" or similar).

65 So Sachedina, *Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, pp. 45-46.

66 Q 42:7, 17, 52.

67 Kassis, "The Quran," pp. 72-73.

68 See Hadith of Bukhari 1.1.2 and 3 [volume, book, number].

69 42:7 "And thus have We revealed to you an Arabic Qur'ān." So also 12:2; 20:113; 13:37; 26:195; 16:103; 39:28.

70 Hence Kabbani (*A Letter to Christendom*, p. 34) bluntly says that a translated text is a different text!

71 Kassis, "The Qur'an," p. 70.

72 Coward, *Sacred Word*, pp. 85-86.

73 A masterful—albeit not so easy to understand for the contemporary reader—classic study on the meaning of symbols and signs in the scriptural canon is offered by the most important Sunni theologian, the celebrated eleventh-century Al-Ghazzali in his little work *The Niche for Lights* (also known as *Mishkat al-Anwarâ*), which is basically a commentary on Qur'an 24:34 (the so-called "Light" passage). See part II, titled "The Science of Symbolism" (available at [sacred-texts.com](http://sacred-texts.com)).

74 There is a belief that the "verses" and "chapters" were placed in a certain order by Muhammad himself. The "verses" can be identified auditiely by rhyme and rhythm. See Kassis, "The Qur'an," pp. 70-71.

75 Denffer, *Loading Options Ulu m al-Qur'an*, p. 123. An important part of the exegesis negotiates the universal and limited applicability of passages (say, polygamy) in light of the "occasions of revelation" principle; for succinct comments, see Bennett, *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations*, pp. 41-42.

76 For a useful account of Islamic exegesis, see Coward, *Sacred Word*, pp. 94-101.

77 Even the context of this passage speaks for a unity of divine revelation (42:13-14).

78 For the project, see "The Official Website of A Common Word" at <http://www.acommonword.com/>.

79 Often the passage in 56:78-80 is invoked in this discussion even though its exegesis—as illustrated in different renderings in English—is debated: "That (this) is indeed a noble Qur'an. In a Book kept hidden Which none toucheth save the purified, A revelation from the Lord of the Worlds. (Marmaduke Pickthall's translation)

80 For thoughtful and important reflections, see Koshul, "Affirming the Self through Accepting the Other," pp. 111-19; also, Coward, *Pluralism*, pp. 55-59.

81 Ibn Hazm's *Kitab-al-Fasl, The Book of Distinctions* is an important early study of other religions and their claims to revelation from an Islamic perspective. Not easily available in English, an important section thereof, titled "On the Inconsistencies of the Four Gospels," can be found in Constable, *Medieval Iberia*.

82 Christian apologetics and polemics began to deal with the charge of tahrif as early as in the ninth Christian century. The Christian Arabic writing *Risalah* by Al-Kindy (of whom we know little) takes up the challenge and seeks to combat it. The book (Sir William Muir's 1887 translation) can be found at <http://www.answering-islam.org/Books/Al-Kindi/>. The nineteenth-century apologist Karl Gottlieb Pfander used *Risalah* extensively in the continuing defense of the Bible against tahrif charges. The 1910 English translation of his *Balance of Truth* (orig. German 1823) is available at <http://www.answering-islam.org/Books/Pfander/Balance/index.htm>; pp. 27-30 summarize succinctly Pfander's criteria for a true revelation as opposed to the failings of truths in the Qur'an.

83 For discussion, see Bennett, *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations*, pp. 124-26 particularly.

84 This trend began as early as in the nineteenth century, pioneered by one of the most important modern apologeticists, whose writings are still consulted in Islamic polemics

(Ramhatullah Ibn Khalil al-'Uthmany), al-Kairawani, who offered a massive rebuttal of Pfander's Balance of Truth. For discussion, see Bennett, *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations*, pp. 131-37 particularly.

85 Bennett, *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations*, p. 16.

86 See Barker and Gregg, "Muslim Perceptions of Jesus," p. 83. There are about 100 references to Jesus in the Qur'an and many more in the Hadith traditions; those are discussed in some detail in the volume *Christ and Reconciliation*.

87 In some strands of Islam, particularly in the esoteric Sufism, the veneration of Muhammad goes way beyond the established tradition, making him not only an embodiment of "Perfect Man" but also a carrier of divine light and expression of divine attributes. In the popular cult of this tradition, no less than 201 names of Muhammad play a central part (cf. 99 beautiful names of Allah). See further, Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, p. 47.

88 Hence, the heading "The 'Christ of Islam' is the Koran," in Imbach, *Three Faces of Jesus*, p. 87. See further, Balic, "Image of Jesus in Contemporary Islamic Theology," p. 1 [1-8].

89 Cornell, "Listening to God through the Qur'an," p. 37.

90 Coward, *Sacred Word*, p. 86, based on Ayoub, *The Qur'an*, pp. 8-9 particularly.

91 Ayoub, *The Qur'an*, p. 11; I am indebted to Coward, *Sacred Word*, p. 86.

92 Ayoub, "Word of God in Islam," p. 73.

93 "Torah and Christ are both seen, respectively, as Word of God." Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, p. 31.

94 Lapide, *Resurrection of Jesus*, p. 30.

95 *Ibid.*

96 Susannah Heschel, "Jewish Views of Jesus," in *JWF*, p. 149.

97 Lapide, *Israelis, Jews, and Jesus*, pp. 3-4.

98 Michael J. Cook, "Jewish Perspectives on Jesus," in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus*, ed. Delbert Burkett (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 215.

99 For contemporary significance of Toldot Yeshu, see Ernst Bammel, "Christian Origins in Jewish Tradition," *New Testament Studies* 13, no. 4 (1967): 317-35.

100 This paragraph is based on Heschel, "Jewish Views of Jesus," in *JWF*, pp. 149-51. For an informed discussion of three Jewish theologians of Christianity from three different time periods, namely Menachem Ha Me'iri (d. 1315), Moses Mendelssohn (d. 1786), and Elijah Benamozegh (d. 1900), see chap. 3 in Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*.

101 Lapide, *Israelis, Jews, and Jesus*, pp. 76-77.

102 *Ibid.*, p. 77.

103 Lapide, *Israelis, Jews, and Jesus*, p. 88; extracanonical texts referred to, among others, are b. Sanhedrin 106a and Yalkut Shimoni 766.

104 b. Sanhedrin 17a; see Lapide, *Israelis, Jews, and Jesus*, p. 89.

105 See *Ibid.*, p. 86.

106 Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem; or, On Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. Allan Arkush (Hannover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1983), p. 134, cited in Heschel, "Jewish Views of Jesus," in *JWF*, p. 151.

107 The contribution of one of the leading Jewish scholars is analyzed in Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1998). Other prominent Jesus scholars include Heinrich Graetz, Levi Herzfeld, Joseph Derenbourg, Leo Baeck, Joseph Eschelbacher, and Felix Perles, among others, as listed in Heschel, "Jewish Views of Jesus," in *JWF*, p. 152.

108 See further, Donald A. Hagner, *The Jewish Reclamation of Jesus: An Analysis and Critique of the Modern Jewish Study of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); idem, "Paul in Modern Jewish Thought," in *Pauline Studies: Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce on his 70th Birthday*, ed. D. A. Hagner and M. J. Harris (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1980).

109 Trans. Herbert Danby (New York: Macmillan, 1925).

110 As paraphrased by Heschel, "Jewish Views of Jesus," in *JWF*, p. 156.

111 Cook, "Jewish Perspectives on Jesus," p. 224.

112 Heschel, "Jewish Views of Jesus," in *JWF*, p. 152.

113 Alan F. Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

114 Thomas A. Idinopulos and Roy Bowen Ward, "Is Christology Inherently Anti-Semitic? A Critical Review of Rosemary Ruether's Faith and Fratricide," *Journal of the American Academy of Religions* 45, no. 2 (1977): 194-95. According to Lapide (Israelis, Jews, and Jesus, p. 81), "In the period from the fourth to the sixteenth century no fewer than 106 popes and 92 Church councils issued anti-Jewish laws and regulations."

115 Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974); chap. 2 focuses on the anti-Jewish materials in the NT.

116 Ruether, *To Change the World*, p. 31.

117 Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, p. 246.

118 Ruether, *To Change the World*, p. 43.

119 Idinopulos and Ward, "Is Christology Inherently Anti-Semitic?" p. 196.

120 Ibid., pp. 198-99; citation in the text from Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, p. 104.

121 So, e.g., Birger Pearson, "I Thessalonians 2:13-16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation," *Harvard Theological Review* 64 (1971): 79-94; see also Idinopulos and Ward, "Is Christology Inherently Anti-Semitic?" p. 199.

122 Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 194, cited in Idinopulos and Ward, "Is Christology Inherently Anti-Semitic?" p. 200. For a careful discussion of anti-Semitism before Christianity and its continuation apart from Christianity, see Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews*, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1985).

123 Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, p. 75.

124 Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), p. 222; for a detailed discussion, see Luke T. Johnson, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 419-41.

125 Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 166-67.

126 Ibid., p. 39; see also Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), pp. 388, 396, 831-39.

127 Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, p. 114.

128 Braaten, "Introduction: The Resurrection in Jewish-Christian Dialogue," p. 23. It is significant that this statement is part of his Introduction to the Jewish writer Lapide's book on resurrection.

129 Ibid.

130 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 28.

131 Martin Buber, *Der Jude und Sein Judentum: Gesammelte Aufsätze und Reden* (Cologne: no publisher, 1963), p. 562, cited in Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, pp. 28-29. See also Martin Buber, "The Two Foci of the Jewish Soul," in *Israel and the World: Essays in a Time of Crisis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), pp. 28-40. For an informed discussion of Buber's views in this respect by a contemporary Jewish theologian, see Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, pp. 90-95.

132 Schalom Ben-Chorin, *Die Antwort des Jona, Zum Gestaltwandel Israels* (Hamburg: no publisher, 1956), p. 99, cited in Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 30.

133 G. Scholem, "Zum Verständnis der messianischen Idee," *Judaica* 1 (Frankfurt: no publisher, 1963), p. 7, cited in Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 30.

134 Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 30.

135 See further, *Ibid.*, pp. 30-32.

136 Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, p. 115. For a highly promising and constructive essay on Jewish views of incarnation, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Judaism and Incarnation: The Imaginal Body of God," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 239-53.

137 For the role of Christian theology behind the events leading to the Holocaust, see C. Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology*, trans. Edward Quinn (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). For a historical and theological account, see also Thomas A. Idinopulos, "Christianity and the Holocaust," *Cross Currents* 28, no. 3 (Fall 1978): 257-67. See also the important essay by Irving Greenberg, "Judaism, Christianity, and Partnership after the Twentieth Century," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 25-35.

138 Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 32.

139 *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

140 My uneasiness with Christian theologians, as well-informed as they are about Jewish theology and the conditions of the dialogue, such as Clark Williamson (*A Guest in the House of Israel: Post-Holocaust Church Theology* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993]) is the turn to "low Christology" (in this case, building on the Process tradition), which is not in keeping with the mainline Christian tradition and thus, in my mind, does not represent well a Christian position.

141 Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, p. 112.

142 *Ibid.*, p. 102. In another context Kogan (p. 111) adds: "the dialogue ought not to require either participant faith to dismantle itself or to deny age-old core beliefs. We have inherited symbols, concepts, and creeds that tell us who we are and how we fit into the divine scheme of things."

143 Pannenberg, *ST* 2:311.

144 *Ibid.*

145 Pannenberg, *ST* 2:312; so also Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 34.

146 John G. Kelly, "The Cross, the Church, and the Jewish People," in *Atonement Today*, ed. John Goldingay (London: SPCK, 1995), pp. 166-67.

147 Braaten, "Introduction: The Resurrection in Jewish-Christian Dialogue," p. 18.

148 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

149 Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. from the 2nd ed. of 1930, William W. Hallo (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970).

150 Franz Lapide, *Jewish Monotheism and Christian Trinitarian Doctrine: A Dialogue* by Pinchas Lapide and Jürgen Moltmann, trans. Leonard Swidler (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), p. 71: "the coming-to-believe of Christendom was without doubt a God-willed messianic act, a messianic event on the way to the conversion of the world to the One God."

151 Flannery, *Anguish of the Jews*; D. Cohn-Sherbok, *The Crucified Jew* (London: HarperCollins, 1992).

152 Susannah Heschel, "Jewish Views of Jesus," in *JWF*, p. 157.

153 Kelly, "The Cross," p. 168. For a useful, succinct discussion of anti-Semitism in relation to atonement, see Finlan, *Options on Atonement*, pp. 61-69.

154 See Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and David Tracy, eds., *The Holocaust as Interruption, Concilium* 175 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1984).

155 Kelly, "The Cross," p. 177; also pp. 171, 176.

156 Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, p. 116.

157 See further, Steven Kepnes, "'Turn Us to You and We Shall Return': Original Sin, Atonement, and Redemption in Jewish Terms," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 293-319.

158 Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, pp. 11-13. Two clarifying notes have to be added. First, similarly to some Christian forms of Liberalism, many contemporary Liberal Jews either do not believe in the afterlife in the traditional sense or if they do, that is not a matter of concern. Second, the overly general description of "salvation" in Jewish tradition is not to be hastily labeled as "salvation by works" after traditional Christian polemics. The New Perspective in the Christian NT studies has shed new light on this typical Christian interpretation. A detailed discussion will take place in the context of soteriology.

159 Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, p. 116. This observation holds even in light of the different use of these kinds of Scriptures by Jewish tradition in which they mainly speak of the "vicarious" suffering of the People of God in the hands of the enemies. Behind this

interpretation is also the well-known fact that the term “messiah” in the OT seem to denote at times the whole people of God or at least a collective group rather than an individual. The same of course applies to terms such as the (Suffering) Servant of God of Second Isaiah. For an important discussion, see Leora Batnitzky, “On the Suffering of God’s Chosen: Christian Views in Jewish Terms,” in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 203-20.

160 See, e.g., Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, pp. 18, 19, 22, 27-29, and *passim* (published in 2010 and showing an extraordinarily deep and wide knowledge of not only Christian tradition but also of contemporary Christian theology).

161 Lyden, “Atonement in Judaism and Christianity,” 51. A discussion of the Jewish origins can be found in Robert J. Daly, *The Origins of the Christian Doctrine of Sacrifice* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

162 Lyden, “Atonement in Judaism and Christianity,” pp. 47-48, 50. For the significance of the disappearance of Temple sacrificial rites in A.D. 70 for the process of internalizing the meaning of sacrifices in terms of confession and forgiveness, see Adolf Büchler, *Studies in Sin and Atonement in the Rabbinic Literature of the First Century* (New York: Ktav, 1967).

163 Kepnes, “Turn Us to You,” p. 297.

164 *Ibid.*, pp. 297-301.

165 Interestingly, this title occurs only in the book of Hebrews, which among all the NT writings makes most use of the cultic and sacrificial heritage of Judaism.

166 Lyden, “Atonement in Judaism and Christianity,” pp. 50-53. An interesting way to try to find connections between the Christian theology of reconciliation and the Jewish prayer book (*siddur*), which focuses on sacrifice as well, is offered by Peter Ochs, “Israel’s Redeemer Is the One to Whom and with Whom She Prays,” in *The Redemption*, ed. Stephen T. Davis et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), chap. 6.

167 Lyden, “Atonement in Judaism and Christianity,” p. 53.

168 Contra Moltmann (*Way of Jesus Christ*, pp. 35-37), who argues that the Bible contains no expectation for the conversion of Israel to Christ/Messiah and therefore, the church should refrain from mission to Israel and expecting Jews’ conversion.

169 Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, p. xii.

170 *Ibid.*, pp. xii-xiii.

171 *Ibid.*, p. xiii; see also p. 13; on p. 32 Kogan makes the striking statement that the existence of “many billions [who] worship Israel’s God, only some 15 millions of them being Jews” means that “[t]his is either some gigantic accident or the partial fulfillment of God’s commission to Abraham.”

172 Gregory A. Barker and Stephen E. Gregg, “Muslim Perceptions of Jesus: Key Issues,” in *JBC*, p. 83.

173 Reem A. Meshal and M. Reza Pirbhaj, “Islamic Perspectives on Jesus,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus*, ed. Delbert Burkett (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 232.

174 Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2000).

175 Quoted in Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, p. 43.

176 See *Ibid.*, p. 44.

177 For a dramatic later tradition and chronicle of Jesus raising the dead, see the well-known tale by al-Tha’labi (d. 1035 CE) in *JBC*, p. 106-7 where Jesus prays to Allah and raises the dead woman.

178 See further, Mustansir Mir, “Islamic Views of Jesus,” in *JWF*, p. 115.

179 Qur’an 5:110 is an illustrative example: God himself is speaking to Jesus: “thou didst shape of clay as it were the likeness of a bird by My permission, and didst blow upon it and it was a bird by My permission, and thou didst heal him who was born blind and the leper by My permission; and how thou didst raise the dead by My permission.” Other Qur’anic references to Jesus’ miracles include 2:87 in which Jesus is strengthened by the Holy Spirit and given signs to support his teaching, and 4:63. Healings are also recorded in

3:49. For a useful discussion of Jesus' miracles in the Qur'an, see Neil Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), chap. 14.

180 Relevant excerpts are available in JBC, pp. 113-4.

181 N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 154.

182 Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, p. 1.

183 *Ibid.* Behind the Muslim reluctance to consider the Christian view of Christ is also the widespread deep suspicion that Christians let the emperor formulate and corrupt the gospel and Christology.

184 There are roughly 100 references or allusions to Jesus in the Qur'an. A detailed listing and discussion can be found in Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), chap. 2; a useful, thematic summary of these can be found in Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, pp. 20-24. The main titles assigned to Jesus in the Qur'an are *Īsā* (16 times), each time linked with *ibn Maryam*, the son of Mary; *Christ/Messiah* (11), messenger (3). Other attributes include servant, prophet, word, spirit. Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, p. 23.

185 Smail Balić, "The Image of Jesus in Contemporary Islamic Theology," in *We Believe in One God*, ed. A. M. Schimmel and Abdoldjavad Falaturi (London: Burns & Oates, 1979), p. 7.

186 For the purposes of this discussion, there is no way to go into detail about differing Islamic schools (Sunni, Shi'ite, and Sufi, to name the most obvious ones). What makes this more general discussion more justified is that generally speaking the two main traditions, Sunni and Shi'ite speak in a fairly similar way of Jesus Christ. That has to do with especially the earlier commentators, classical Muslim theologians, whose works are still immensely important. If there is any difference, it has to do with the fact that in comparison with the Sunnite commentators, the Shi'ites usually are less comfortable with the idea of the uniqueness of Jesus. See further N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, pp. 176, 191. For specifically Shi'ite interpretations, see, e.g., Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, chap. 4; Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, chap. 7 (which also includes the Sufi views), and chap. 16. The major differences can be found between main schools and Sufi; for that see, e.g., Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, chap. 5.

187 These are conveniently listed and discussed in detail in N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, chap. 2.

188 For a useful discussion, see Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, pp. 132-44.

189 See further, *Ibid.*, p. 2.

190 *Ibid.*, p. 222.

191 It may be significant that in the Sunni Hadith collection *Bukhārī*, which almost gained canonical status, most of the references to Jesus occur in "The Prophets" (*Kitāb al-anbiyā'*).

192 In some strands of Islam, particularly in the esoteric Sufism, the veneration of Muhammad goes way beyond the established tradition, making him not only an embodiment of "Perfect Man" but also a carrier of divine light and expression of divine attributes. In the popular cult of this tradition, no less than 201 names of Muhammad play a central part (cf. 99 beautiful names of Allah). See further, Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, p. 47.

193 Hence, the heading "The 'Christ of Islam' is the Koran," in Josef Imbach, *Three Faces of Jesus: How Jews, Christians, and Muslims See Him*, trans. Jane Wilde (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate Publishers, 1992), p. 87. See further, Balić, "Image of Jesus in Contemporary Islamic Theology," p. 1.

194 "Torah and Christ are both seen, respectively, as Word of God." Kogan, *Opening the Covenant*, p. 31.

195 Muslim, *Kitāb al-Fadā'il*, quoted in Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, p. 38. For sayings clarifying the relation between Muhammad and Jesus, see Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, pp. 37-38.

196 For a useful discussion, see N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, chap. 4.

197 That said, it is also significant that there are number of parallels between the two "founders" of religions as carefully delineated in N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and*

Christianity, chap. 5. For a standard, masterful study, see George Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (London and Oxford: The Sheldon Press and Oneworld Publication, 1995).

198 "The House of Imrān" (Mary's father's house; sura 3) and "Maryam" (sura 19).

199 The early and medieval Muslim polemics paid special attention to Jesus' miracles and sought to relativize their value by comparing them to similar kinds of acts of other prophets. Particular attention in this exercise was given to those OT miracles that had to do with command of nature, transformation of objects such as the budding of Moses' rod, and restoration to life as performed by Elijah and Elisha. The end result of this polemical reasoning was that Christians' taking the miracles of Jesus as an indication of divinity would lead to assigning similar status to many other prophets. D. Thomas, "The Miracles of Jesus in Early Islamic Polemic," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 39, no. 2 (1994): 229; the whole essay is a most useful discussion of this topic.

200 See Thomas, "Miracles of Jesus," p. 240.

201 Michael Nazir-Ali, "Christology in an Islamic Context" and "A Christian Assessment of the Cult of Prophet-Veneration," in *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter* (Oxford: Regnum, 1987), p. 25.

202 The last chapter of *De Haeresibus* (100/101) is unusually long. See further John E. Merrill, "John of Damascus on Islam," *Muslim World* 41 (1951): 88-89, available at [www.answering-islam.org/Books/MW/john\\_d.htm](http://www.answering-islam.org/Books/MW/john_d.htm).

203 Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, p. 24. The highly influential thirteenth-century mystic Ibn al-Arabi's *The Bezels of Wisdom*, a reflection on the 27 perfect men mentioned in the Qur'an who achieved a unique realization of the divine, highlights the importance of the reception of Jesus, which makes him different from other human beings. Ibn-al-Arabi, *Ibn-Al Arabi: The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R. W. J. Austin (London: SPCK, 1980), pp. 174-79, cited in JBC, pp. 116-19.

204 Heikki Räisänen, "The Portrait of Jesus in the Qur'an: Reflections of a Biblical Scholar," *Muslim World* 70 (1980): 124.

205 Ibid.

206 See Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, pp. 29-30. So also N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 40; Robinson (p. 37) rightly reminds us that "the Qur'anic representation of Jesus serves to legitimise Muhammad by giving the impression that he was doing what Jesus had done before him." Qur'an 61:14 is a striking example of this.

207 Räisänen, "The Portrait of Jesus in the Qur'an," p. 127. Where Räisänen's argumentation seems much weaker is the contrasting of Luke with the presentation of Jesus by John, the latter allegedly focusing mostly on the preexistent Christ and identification with God. True, those themes are more robustly present in John, but at the same time, the Johannine Christology also contains many features that speak of voluntary submission and subordination, such as talk about "my God and your God" (John 20:17). See further, Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, pp. 28-29.

208 Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1985 [1956]), pp. 258-60.

209 Ibid., p. 258.

210 Ibid., p. 259.

211 Ibid., p. 258.

212 Hans Küng, *Christianity and World Religions: Path to Dialogue* (New York: Doubleday, 1986), p. 110 (emphasis in original).

213 Ibid., p. 111 (emphasis in original). Küng considers that the image of Jesus in the Qur'an is incomplete, and how different it is from the historical Jesus of the Gospels. "The portrait of Jesus in the Qur'ān is all one-sided, too monotone, and for the most part lacking in content, apart from monotheism, the call to repentance, and various account of miracles." Hans Küng, "Christianity and World Religions: The Dialogue with Islam as One Model," *The Muslim World* 77 (1987): 88. I am indebted to my student Reda Samuel for this reference.

214 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Response to Hans Küng's Paper on Christian-Muslim Dialogue," *The Muslim World* 77 (1987): 100. For Küng's contribution to the public debate held at George Washington University in 1984, see the same issue of *The Muslim World*.

- 215 Nasr, "Response to Hans Küng's Paper," p. 99.
- 216 Al-Busiri, *Qasidah Burdah*, chap. 3, lines 29-32, trans. Abdal Hakim Murad, cited in JBC, p. 115.
- 217 Maḥmud M. Ayoub, "Jesus the Son of God: A Study of the Terms Ibn and Walad in the Qur'ān and Tafsīr Tradition," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Y. Y. Haddad and W. Z. Haddad (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1995), p. 65.
- 218 Trans. David B. Burrell and Nazih Daher (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1992).
- 219 In JBC, p. 111.
- 220 A common Muslim assessment is this: "It is hardly necessary to argue that neither the Qur'ān nor early Muslim traditionists were aware of the theological doctrines of the church fathers and church councils in their debate with Christians, but they were aware of Christian piety, liturgy, and worship" (Ayoub, "Jesus the Son of God," p. 66).
- 221 English translations of these texts were first published by Rev. John W. Voorhis in *The Muslim World* 24 (1934): 391-98, and vol. 25 (1935): 266-73. These translations were based on the Greek text of J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 94 (1864), cols. 764-73; sec. 101, Latin text in parallel columns. The same English translations of these two texts were reprinted in N. A. Newman, ed., *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632-900 A.D.)*, Translations with Commentary (Hatfield: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993), pp. 133-68. The current study will consult Newman's *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*. For secondary studies on these texts, see, in addition to the introductions of the editions of the previous studies, the excellent study by Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: Brill, 1972); and also J. Windrow Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology: A Study of the Interpretation of Theological Ideas in the Two Religions* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1945), part 1, vol. 1, pp. 63-66.
- 222 Newman, *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, p. 139.
- 223 *Ibid.*, pp. 144-47; for the Qur'anic "Spirit-Christology," see the careful discussion in Olaf Schumann, *Jesus the Messiah in Muslim Thought* (Delhi, India: ISPCK, 2002), pp. 14-18.
- 224 For the history of the church in the Middle East until the time of the rise of Islam, see Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* (Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2000), pp. 11-17; see also Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 129-40.
- 225 The manner of expression is important in Qur'an 21:91 and has striking parallels with Christian tradition: "And the one who guarded her virginity, so We breathed into her of Our spirit. And We made her and her son a sign for all the worlds." The same idea, almost verbatim, can also be found in 66:12. (The quoted texts from the Qur'an are from *The Holy Qur'an: A New English Translation of Its Meanings* © 2008 Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Amman, Jordan. This version of the Qur'an is also available online at <http://altafsir.com>).
- 226 Jesus is also called "a Word from God" (or "from Him") in another important passage: 3:45.
- 227 Behind (some of) these statements there is also the need to combat the Jewish interpretation according to which Ezra was considered the Son of God (however that was understood theologically).
- 228 This paragraph is based on a careful analysis of twelve leading Muslim anti-Christian writers who reproduced fifteen defining texts in Arabic from the beginnings to the end of the tenth century, by an Egyptian doctoral student at Fuller Theological Seminary. These Muslim writers varied in terms of their denominational and theological affiliations, their styles and purposes of writing, and also their emphases and concerns. Writings include standard texts such as *The Letter of al-Hāshimī* by 'Abd Allāh ibn Ismā'īl al-Hāshimī, *Kitāb al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā* (The Book of the Refutation of the Christians) by Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm al-Rassī, and Abū 'Uthmān al-Jāhīz's *Kitāb al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā* (The Book of the Refutation of the Christians). Reda Samuel, "The Incarnation in Arabic Christian

Theology from the Beginnings to the Mid-Eleventh Centuries,” PhD tutorial, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Intercultural Studies, Spring 2010.

229 Some commentators even declared that they found in the Bible about 20,000 verses that suggest Jesus’ humanity, and less than 10 allusions that were used to support Jesus’ divinity!

230 Kenneth Cragg, “‘Greater is God’: Contemporary Takbīr: Muslim and Christian,” *Muslim World* 71, no. 1 (January 1981): 38.

231 Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian* (London: Mowbray, 1992), p. 288.

232 Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 264.

233 He summarizes the main argumentation succinctly in an essay titled “Islam and Incarnation,” in *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions: Conflicting Truth Claims*, ed. John Hick (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), pp. 126-39 [published in the UK under the title *Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship between World Religions*]. Another important source is the chapter titled “The Decisive Faith: ‘God in Christ,’” in Kenneth Cragg’s *Jesus and the Muslim*. See also his *The Weight in the Word: Prophethood: Biblical and Quranic* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999); idem., *Muhammad in the Qur’an: The Task and the Text* (London: Melisende, 2001).

234 Cragg, “Islam and Incarnation,” p. 126.

235 See further, Cragg, “Islam and Incarnation,” pp. 126-27.

236 Cragg, “Islam and Incarnation,” pp. 127-28. Speaking of this interpenetration, Cragg also daringly uses the term “association,” well aware of the dangerous connotations when having to do with Shirk, the main Muslim charge against Christians for allegedly compromising the unity of God with the doctrine of the Trinity.

237 Cragg, “Islam and Incarnation,” 131.

238 Cragg, “Islam and Incarnation,” pp. 128-32 (131).

239 Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, p. 198.

240 George H. Bebawi, “Atonement and Mercy: Islam between Athanasius and Anselm,” in *Atonement Today*, ed. John Goldingay (London: SPCK, 1995), p. 185.

241 M. A. Merad, “Christ according to the Qur’an,” *Encounter* (Rome) 69 (1980): 14, 15, quoted in Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, p. 4.

242 Clinton Bennett, *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations: Past and Present* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 51.

243 Mahmoud M. Ayoub, “Towards an Islamic Christology, II: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion (A Study in the Death of Jesus in Tafsīr Literature),” *The Muslim World* 70, no. 2 (1980): 94.

244 See, e.g., Kare Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Oxford: One World, 1997), pp. 216-17.

245 The last chapter of *De haeresibus* (100/101) is unusually long. See further Merrill, “Of the Tractate of John of Damascus on Islam,” 88-89.

246 Durban: Islamic Propagation Centre International, 1984.

247 Translation of N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 106.

248 For a careful analysis of this key verse which is used in Islamic theology to reject the Christian interpretation of crucifixion (and resurrection), see H. Busse, “Jesu Errettung vom Kreuz in der islamischen Koranexegese von Sure 4:157,” *Oriens* 36 (2001): 160-95. For a lucid, non-technical discussion of various interpretations of this and related key passages, see Bennett, *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations*, pp. 51-52.

249 According to S. H. Nasr (*Islamic Life and Thought* [London: Kazi Publications, 1981], 210 ) the denial of the cross is one of the foundational differences between the two religions.

250 Or then the Jews killed another person but claimed that was Jesus. There is yet another version, a minority opinion, according to which Jesus died on the cross but it had no spiritual effects after the Christian interpretation; see Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims: A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 2005), pp. 9-10.

251 For a brief account, see Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, pp. 67-69. Although by far the most widely held opinion, the substitution theory itself has passed through several stages of development from at first identifying as the substitute a volunteer, later as a criminal (“punishment substitutionism”), and finally as Simon. Ayoub, “Towards an Islamic Christology II,” pp. 97-99. The important fourteenth-century Muslim theologian in Damascus Ibn Kathir suggests as the substitute a person by the name of Sergius, whose identity remains unknown. The excerpt can be found in JBC, p. 120; see also pp. 119-23.

252 There is a long tradition in Islamic theology that attributes the mistaken Christian understanding to erroneous transmission of the texts; see Martin Whittingham, “How Could So Many Christians Be Wrong? The Role of Tawātur (Recurrent Transmission of Reports) in Understanding Muslim Views of the Crucifixion,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 19, no. 2 (April 2008): 167-78.

253 N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 106. My discussion on crucifixion is deeply indebted to this source even when it is not explicitly mentioned.

254 Sahih al-Bukhari (vol. 3, book 34, no. 425): “Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah’s Apostle said, ‘By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, son of Mary (Jesus) will shortly descend amongst you people (Muslims) as a just ruler and will break the Cross and kill the pig and abolish the Jizya (a tax taken from the non-Muslims, who are in the protection, of the Muslim government). Then there will be abundance of money and no-body will accept charitable gifts.’” (<http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/hadith/bukhari/>; accessed 1/11/2011).

255 For his encounter with Caliph al-Mahdi, see Bennett, *Understanding Islam*, pp. 89-101.

256 Qur’an 19:33: “Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive! (The context determines that this speaks of Jesus since this is one of the two suras of Mary, the main sources of Jesus’ life in the Qur’an).

257 “(And remember) when Allah said: O Jesus! Lo! I am gathering thee and causing thee to ascend unto Me, and am cleansing thee of those who disbelieve and am setting those who follow thee above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me ye will (all) return, and I shall judge between you as to that wherein ye used to differ.” The phrase translated here “ascend unto Me” is usually taken to mean “cause you to die”

258 N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 107.

259 This paragraph is based on *ibid.*, pp. 108-9.

260 “By this statement the Quran gives evidence for the divine nature of Christ which is the Word of God neither pain nor scorn can touch.” Cited in N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 108 (without original reference).

261 This view is also supported by the common Christian interpretation of biblical teaching that it was the Romans rather than the Jews who put Jesus to death.

262 There have been interesting attempts on the Christian side to explain the Qur’anic passage 4:156-59 in terms of sectarian Christian implications and debates such as that between the Nestorians and monophysites. Whereas the former, as mentioned, attributed the death only to the human nature, monophysites, in their insistence on one nature, can only speak of the death on the cross in terms of the divine nature suffering. Another sectarian interpretation, appealing to Muslim tradition as well, is the ancient Gnostic tradition in which it was not Jesus but rather Simon the Cyrene who was crucified. N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, pp. 110-11.

263 N. Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, devotes the whole of chap. 12 to the detailed discussion of the use of this term in the Qur’an and relevant Muslim commentaries.

264 For a brief, detailed discussion, see *Ibid.*, pp. 113-15.

265 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

266 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

267 *Ibid.*, p. 140, at the end of the chapter-long detailed study of this expression in the Qur’an and commentary literature.

268 Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, pp. 167-68.

269 Bebawi, “Atonement,” pp. 191-92.

- 270 See further, Wiel Eggen, SMA, "Africa and Vasco da Gama's Voyage: Issues and Solution," *African Ecclesial Review* 40, no. 5/6 (1998): 336.
- 271 Carman, *Majesty & Meekness*, p. 5.
- 272 Ward, *Images of Eternity*, p. 1.
- 273 Cf. Baier, "Ultimate Reality in Buddhism and Christianity," pp. 89-90.
- 274 Thatamanil, *Immanent Divine*, p. xii.
- 275 Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*.
- 276 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, p. 173.
- 277 Clooney, *Hindu God, Christian God*, p. 7 (emphasis mine).
- 278 Rivera, *Touch of Transcendence*, p. 118.
- 279 Newlands and Smith, *Hospitable God*, p. 32.
- 280 See Thatamanil, *Immanent Divine*, p. xii.
- 281 Newlands and Smith, *Hospitable God*, p. 32.
- 282 Newlands and Smith, *Hospitable God*, p. 33.
- 283 Newlands and Smith, *Hospitable God*, p. 37.
- 284 See Zayd, *Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates*, p. vii. For an important study, see Köchler, *Concept of Monotheism*.
- 285 Carman, *Majesty & Meekness*, p. 323.
- 286 There are numerous Qur'anic condemnations of shirk although it is not quite clear what that "tremendous sin" (4.48) consists of.
- 287 Carman, *Majesty & Meekness*, p. 323. In that sense, Islamic theology is most radically "dualistic" in making a distinction between the divine and reality, in contrast to advaitic (and even moderately advaitic) Hinduism, which is monistic. For an important comparative study, important also for Christian theology, see Singh, *God in Indian Islamic Theology*.
- 288 Vroom, *No Other Gods*, p. 84.
- 289 For a useful discussion, see Winkler, *Contemporary Muslim and Christian Responses*, pp. 270-75.
- 290 Nazir-Ali, *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter*, p. 21.
- 291 Consider also 1.6: "Now, when this state prevails, it is called in relation to him who experiences it, Extinction, nay, Extinction of Extinction, for the soul has become extinct to itself, extinct to its own extinction" (1.6). For comments, including parallels with Hindu monism, see Ward, *Images of Eternity*, pp. 120-22.
- 292 Ward, *Images of Eternity*, p. 122.
- 293 The three basic levels are those "veiled by pure darkness," the atheists; those "veiled by mixed light and darkness"; and those "veiled with, pure Light," among whom are those who "have searched out and understood the true meaning of the divine attributes" (3:1-3).
- 294 While the Qur'an does not specify 99 names (indeed more than 99 names and designations of God can be found therein), early in Islamic theology, the number 99 came to be used. The Qur'an merely mentions: "And to God belong the Most Beautiful Names" (7:180). The list of 99 names is given definitively in the established commentaries on sura 17:110. Surprisingly, not until recently a major study on the names appeared, which, to my knowledge, unfortunately, is not translated into English: Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam*. For an accessible, succinct brief discussion of all 99 names, see Zwemer, *Moslem Doctrine of God*, chap. 3.
- 295 See further, Carman, *Majesty & Meekness*, p. 327.
- 296 Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today*, pp. 47-48.
- 297 See Cragg, "Al-Rahman al-Rahim," pp. 235-36.
- 298 Gardet, "Allāh," p. 407.
- 299 For an important discussion of love, mercy, and justice in relation to Allah, see Volf, *Allah*, chaps. 8, 9.
- 300 Al-Ghazali, *Alchemy of Happiness*, chap. 1, p. 32; chap. 2; p. 41, respectively.
- 301 Rippin and Knappert, *Textual Sources for the Study of Islam*, p. 18.
- 302 As explained by Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam*, p. 147, cited in Carman, *Majesty & Meekness*, p. 330.

- 303 Carman, *Majesty & Meekness*, p. 326.
- 304 For an important discussion, see Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes*.
- 305 In MacDonald, *Development of Muslim Theology*, p. 294.
- 306 See further el-Bizri, “God: Essence and Attributes,” pp. 121-40.
- 307 For a brief comment, see Carman, *Majesty & Meekness*, pp. 328-29.
- 308 See further, Zayd, *Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates*, p. viii.
- 309 For such a listing, see Carman, *Majesty & Meekness*, p. 329n.14.
- 310 For details, see Zayd, *Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates*, pp. 1-63; 65-101 (65)
- 311 Zayd, *Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates*, pp. 65-101 (65).
- 312 Carman, *Majesty & Meekness*, pp. 326-27 (327).
- 313 Al-Ghazali, *Alchemy of Happiness*, chap. 1, p. 32.
- 314 Al-Ghazali, *Alchemy of Happiness*, chap. 1, p. 19. The first citation is attributed to Muhammad.
- 315 The classic work here is that of Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, which casts serious doubts on the value of philosophical argumentation alone, apart from revelation, to accomplish its theological task. Yet Al-Ghazali—similarly to the Christian Thomas Aquinas—is the leading philosopher-theologian of his tradition!
- 316 Hammond, *Philosophy of Alfarabi*, pp. 22-29; for a detailed linking of the attributes with Plato and Aristotle, see Zayd, *Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates*, xiii-xx.
- 317 See further, Vroom, *No Other Gods*, p. 84. Vroom reminds us that we should not, however, conceive the notion of “obedience” in too legalistic terms, in light of the way St. Paul speaks of the “obedience of faith,” which is about covenant-faithfulness (p. 84).
- 318 For his doctrine of God, see Zayd, *Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates*.
- 319 In Zayd, *Al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates*, pp. x-xi (x). For an authoritative contemporary presentation, see Abduh, *Theology of Unity*.
- 320 Nasr, “The Word of God: The Bridge between Him, You, and Us,” p. 112.
- 321 The main Qur’anic passages that deny the divinity of Jesus are 4:171; 9:30; and 19:35. As an indication of the lack of intimate knowledge of the orthodox Christian teaching on the Trinity, 5:116 conceives the Trinity as Father, Jesus, and Mary. Similarly, in relation to Judaism, there is the misleading statement that “Jews call Ezra a son of God” (9:30).
- 322 See further, Parrinder, *Jesus in the Quran*, pp. 126-41.
- 323 Cragg, “Greater is God,” pp. 27-39.
- 324 Cragg, “Greater is God,” p. 38.
- 325 Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 264.
- 326 Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, p. 203.
- 327 Jenson, “The Risen Prophet,” pp. 61-62, cited in Swanson, “The Trinity in Christian-Muslim Conversation,” p. 261.
- 328 Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, p. 204.
- 329 Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, p. 11; see also p. 278.
- 330 Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, p. 287.
- 331 Pannenberg, *ST 1:335-36*.
- 332 Pannenberg, *ST 1:383*.
- 333 In *Historic Creeds and Confessions*, p. 5. See also the strong statement on the unity in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) statement against the excesses of Joachim of Fiore, in Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils*, p. 236.
- 334 Cusa, *De Pace Fidei* #15; 23; Nicholas of Cusa, “De docta ignorantia,” in *Selected Spiritual Writings*, #14
- 335 Cusa, “De docta ignorantia,” #57 (quoting Augustine); I am indebted to Volf, *Allah*, p. 52,
- 336 See Volf, *Allah*, pp. 53-54, for detailed listing of passages from Nicholas of Cusa in response to the classic Qur’anic passages of affirming the oneness of God and rebutting the (Christian) doctrine of Trinity (5:73, 116; 23:91).
- 337 Cusa, *Cribration Alkurani* #108.
- 338 See Cusa, *De Pace Fidei* #72; Volf, *Allah*, pp. 56-57.
- 339 See further Augustine, *Trinity* 1.8.

340 See further Augustine, Trinity 6.9.

341 See further, Volf, Allah, p. 138.

342 Ward, Religion and Revelation, p. 179.

343 See further Roberts, "Trinity vs. Monotheism," p. 90.

344 Cited in van Gorder, No God But God, p. 115, from Nasr, Les Musulmans, p. 139.

345 See further, Watt, "Islamic Theology and the Christian Theologian," p. 242.

346 Nasr, "Word of God," p. 115.

347 Volf, Allah, p. 1. Similarly, "A Common Word Between Us and You": "If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace." For the dramatic illustration of the implications to religious and political unrest and uneasiness due to one religion's view of another religion's deity, consider the outrage among Muslims because of the remarks of Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg address, which implied that Islam and its God is violent by nature. Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University." For exposition and comments, see Volf, Allah, chap. 1. A conciliatory response to the pope's speech was offered by a number of Muslim leaders and scholars: "Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI," <http://ammanmessage.com/media/openLetter/english.pdf>.

348 Levenson, "Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?" p. 32, emphasis added.

349 It might be important to note that according to sura 3:67 there were monotheists (called hanif) in Arabia before the time of Muhammad.

350 K. Thomas, "Allah in Translations of the Bible," p. 301; for an accessible discussion of the etymology, history, and background of the term allah, see Tennent, Theology in the Context of World Christianity, pp. 27-31. For a detailed investigation, see also Shehadeh, "Do Muslims and Christians Believe in the Same God?"

351 In this light, consider the ban by Malaysian Home Ministry for Christians to use the designation "Allah" in relation to their God, as in 2007 under militant leaders it reinforced the law established in 1986. For a current update, see "Can Christians Say 'Allah'?"

352 Tennent, Theology in the Context of World Christianity, p. 31.

353 In that light, Lamin Sanneh's question is useful and important: "Was not the 'Allah' of Arabian Islam the same as the 'Allah' of pre-Islamic Arab Christianity?" ("Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?" p. 35). It also reminds us of the at-times fierce debates within Christian tradition as to whether the "God" of classical theism is the same as the "God" of panentheism.

354 Apart from the lack of many biographical details, it is an established scholarly commonplace that John served in some important public role in the Muslim Caliph's administration, along with his role in ecclesiastical affairs, including the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787. For our purposes, an interesting detail has to do with his knowledge of Arabic, which cannot be established on the basis of the available sources.

355 Sahas, John of Damascus on Islam: The "Heresy of the Ishmaelites," #4 (p. 71).

356 D. Thomas, "Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Abbasid Era," pp. 78-98.

357 Nicholas of Cusa's De Pace Fidei and Cribratio Alkorani, #68. For useful comments, see Volf, Allah, chap. 2.

358 Cusa, De Pace Fidei, #5.

359 Cusa, De Pace Fidei, #6.

360 See, e.g., Cusa, Cribratio Alkorani, #23, 31

361 Cusa, Cribratio Alkorani, #238.

362 Volf, Allah, p. 50.

363 Cusa, De Pace Fidei, #10.

364 For a representative pejorative comment on Muslims ("Turks" in his vocabulary), see Luther, Large Catechism, art. III, p. 76. Indeed, what ironically annoyed Luther greatly was Zwingli's somewhat more open-minded attitude to Muslims: Luther, Word and Sacrament IV, 38:290. For Calvin's views of religions in general and Muslims in particular, see my "Calvin and Religions," pp. 266-83.

365 Luther, Large Catechism, art. III, p. 76.

366 For useful comments on Luther, see Volf, Allah, chap. 3.

367 See, e.g., the statement by George Sale, the first translator of the Qur'an into English in 1734, who says in the "Preliminary Discourse" preface, "That both Mohammed and those among his followers . . . had and continue to have just and true notions of God and his attributes (always excepting their obstinate and impious rejecting of the Trinity), appears so plain from the Koran itself and all the Mohammedan divines, that it would be loss of time to refute those who supposed the God of Mohammed to be different from the true God" (as cited in W. Montgomery Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today*, p. 45).

368 See Vroom, *No Other Gods*, pp. 103-4.

369 See further, Sachedina, *Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, pp. 24, 78.

370 See Pannenberg, *ST* 3:482-83.

371 For comments, see Vroom, *No Other Gods*, p. 104.

372 See further, Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, p. 173.

373 For a current Muslim argument, see Abd-Allah, "Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?"; see further Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, p. 34.

374 See further, Vroom, *No Other Gods*, pp. 91-92.

375 Levenson, "Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?" p. 33.

376 See further, Volf, *Allah*, pp. 97-98. For a detailed comparison, commandment by commandment, between the Ten Commandments and Qur'anic teaching, see further, pp. 106-7.

377 For a highly nuanced discussion of three monotheistic faiths' conception of God, see Arnaldez, *Trois Messagers Pour Un Seul Dieu*.

378 See further H. A. Wolfson, "The Muslim Attributes and the Christian Trinity."

379 Jørgensen, "'Word of God' and 'Spirit of God.'"

380 Volf, *Allah*, p. 14. This is not a new insight. See the careful investigation of a number of common Muslim misunderstandings of the Trinity, including the physical conception of the Son or plurality of deities in the Trinity, in Aquinas, *De Rationibus Fidei* 1263 (pp. 31-52).

381 A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity, p. 91. This volume contains both Paul's letter and Ibn Taymiyya's writings with introductions and commentaries. Tactics similar to Paul's were employed already in one of the earliest major exchanges between Mar Timothy I, the Nestorian patriarch (d. 823 C.E.) and Muhawarah, the ruling Caliphate. For an accessible discussion, see Bennett, *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations*, chap. 4.

382 See, e.g., Piper, "A Common Word Between Us?"

383 *Nostra Aetate* #3.

384 Importantly, the late John Paul II believed that Vatican II warrants unreserved identification: *Insegnamenti* 8, no. 2 (1985): 497 (available at [vatican.ca](http://vatican.ca) website).

385 The same careful affirmation and nuancing is present in the highly influential exchange between the Roman Catholic Church in France and Muslims, many of whom have migrated there from various North African countries and thus represent a diversity within that faith. For a careful study with full sources, see Jukko, *Trinitarian Theology in Christian-Muslim Encounters*; for a shorter discussion and assessment, see chap. 10 in my *Trinity and Religious Pluralism*.

386 According to the Christian Abd al-Masih, this is also an established fact at the grassroots level in his context, the Near East: "Allah? The God of Islam and the God of Christianity?" p. 1.

387 For comments, see Volf, *Allah*, pp. 79-80.

388 Lamin Sanneh, S. Wesley Ariajah, Dudley Woodberry (Christian); John Levenson (Jewish); Umar F. Abd-Allah (Muslim) in various 2004 issues.

389 For an important public agreement prior to the "Common Word," see Schimmel and Falatūri, *We Believe in One God*.

390 Volf summarizes: "I will propose, from a Christian perspective, a way to affirm that Christians and Muslims worship the same God even if their visions of God differ" (*Allah*, p. 35). For a highly nuanced contemporary Roman Catholic affirmation, see Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology*, pp. 259-62, and chap. 10 at large.

391 Vroom, *No Other Gods*, p. 113.

392 Jukko, *Trinitarian Theology in Muslim-Christian Encounters*, p. 214.

393 Jukko, *Trinitarian Theology in Muslim-Christian Encounters*, pp. 221-22.

394 See Jukko, *Trinitarian Theology in Muslim-Christian Encounters*, p. 244.

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